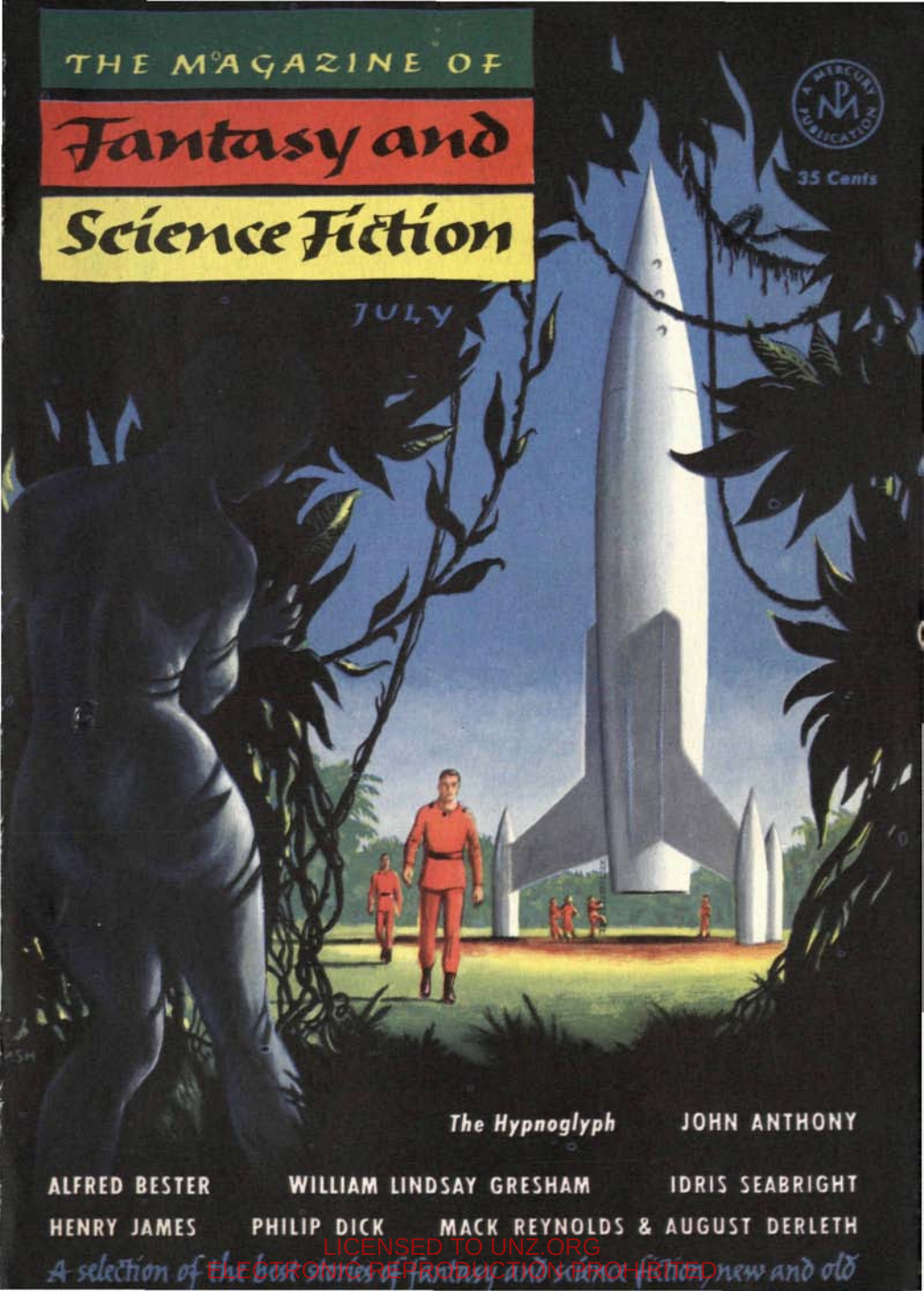

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 5, No. 1 JULY

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(from The Hypnoglyph, by John Anthony)

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Novelty in science fiction has become inevitably a matter of giving new twists to the standard themes — and even these twists are rare enough and loudly to be welcomed. Here, however, the author of NIGHTMARE ALLEY *comes up, not merely with a variation, but with a basic concept which has never before been treated in science fiction, and develops it with such beautiful sensitivity that we can only say: "Here is one of the finest stories that we have yet been privileged to publish."*

The Star Gypsies

by WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

JOHNNY'S GRANDMOTHER, Old Anna, was the one who warned us about the blistered places. She could feel in her bones when the earth was sick, and she would wake from her sleep inside the *vardo* as it jolted along and screech at Johnny to turn aside. Then the caravan would take another road. The roads were rough where cracks had slid across them, and grass had sprouted between the slabs of concrete. They were the old roads of the old times, and now the trees often met over them. But Johnny Petulengro had the knowledge of them in his head, and of where the springs of water were and where the villages of the *gorgio* people lay.

We were making a detour around one of the sick places when we came upon this village, and the girl with golden hair was the first *gorgio* we saw. Johnny pulled the reins and the old white horse stopped moving and dropped his head to crop the grass growing in the cracks.

As was proper for a king, Johnny waited for the *gorgio* girl to speak first. She had wide blue eyes that tilted up at the corners, and her skin was tanned almost as dark as mine, but when she slid down the bank I could see that above her knees her thighs were as white as snow. She stood quiet a moment, her lips open a little, and she was looking first at Johnny and then at me. She looked longest at me where I sat beside Johnny Petulengro on the seat of the *vardo*.

Finally she said softly, "*Sarishan*, Rom."

Johnny chuckled and put his arm around my shoulders. I was his son now — he had decided to take me for a son.

"*Sarishan*, child. Where is your village?"

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She pointed along the road. "There's a turning . . . I was sent to watch for any king who might favor us." She dropped to one knee, and the beauty of her motion warned me that I was in danger of love with the *gorgio* girl. If a Rom has love with a *gorgio* he is in danger of being caught by the village ways, and then his soul dies.

Johnny smiled and the girl stood up again, straight, her bare brown feet together. I tried not to look at her feet. I was sixteen and a man, and I must think like a Romany man. That's what I said to myself with Johnny's arm around me, and Johnny smiling down at the *gorgio* girl.

"What gifts has your village?" Johnny asked.

"We have chickens and pigs and the Old Cloth," she said.

"Give her a hand up, Fedar," Johnny told me, laughing. "She can ride with us."

And I stretched out my hand and helped her to the seat. I could feel the warmth of her next to me. "I am the king's son," I said to her. "This is Johnny Petulengro, the king, and he has taken me for a son. But I am half *gorgio* — my mother was a Rom who had love with a village man. When our village died of the Heartsickness I came back to the Romany, and now I am Johnny's son."

"It is a mighty thing to be Romany," the girl said without looking at me. "When I was little I used to pretend that I led the Great Life, and I would set snares for rabbits the way the Romany kings showed us. Once I roasted a rabbit by a fire I built myself."

She was silent then, and I felt the warmth of her.

We went up the side road toward her village; and there, by the roadside, were the offerings all ready — the Old Cloth high on poles, and three chickens in a pen, and in another pen, a small pig.

Johnny pulled up, and behind us the other *vardos* of the tribe all stopped. The girl jumped down to unlatch the gate of the chicken run, and then Johnny put his long-lashed whip into my hand, which was slippery with sweat; for if I failed in the ritual I knew that I would never be a king among the Great People. Johnny, acting out the old custom, gave me a sharp slap with the back of his hand and then turned away as if busy. I drew back the whip, making it sing, swung it once as the white hen fluttered across the road, and the lash curled out and wrapped itself about the neck of the hen. A tug and I had her in my arms, and all done silently.

"Aieee! Ha! The Romany blood conquers." Old Anna had been watching from inside the *vardo*. She snatched the chicken from the whip lash and it vanished inside. "You will be a king, Fedar. Now let's see you *chor* the pig."

To *chor* is to take a lost thing, such as a pig which has rooted out of its

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pen and has nobody to feed it. Before the Great War of Burning the *gorgio* ruled the land and would shut the Romany in stone houses with iron bars just for *choring* a chicken, for they were ignorant of the Law that things along the road belong to the Rom, who are kings of the road and lead the Great Life.

When the girl unbarred the pen the pig rushed out. I set the pan of potato peelings Old Anna gave me beside the road; when the little pig began to eat I slipped the sack over him and the pan together, and he was in the *vardo* where his squealing was hardly heard. The kings of the road follow the old custom, and before they will accept gifts from the villagers they first must *chor* a thing or two in memory of ancient days.

We loaded the Old Cloth into our van; it was good cloth, of a golden color and made of strange shimmering threads that shed water, as the *gorgio* knew how to weave it before the Great War of Burning.

When we reached the village the girl left us and ran into a house. It was the Executive's house, so I knew now that she was the Executive's daughter; but still a *gorgio*. The Executive came out with his wife, and Johnny got down from the driver's seat and gave them *Sarishan*. Then all the villagers came running. Johnny heard the wants of the village and said nothing, for a king speaks last.

"There are many ducks in the small river beyond the houses," the Executive explained. "It would be good to have ducks to eat. But the last cartridge for a stun-gun was fired in my father's time. Every year at the time of the ducks we clean and oil the stun-guns, but they do not shoot. My father told me how delicious were ducks. Now they are thick, they settle in flocks on the river, but our [illegible] fall short. Can you show us some of the old wisdom, O King?"

Johnny stood silent. They began bringing the gifts; earthen crocks of the grain from last year's harvest, more chickens and more small pigs, and at last the precious iron — some red with rust, jagged pieces, and some formed into shapes of things the use of which has long been forgotten by the *gorgio* and has never been known by the Romany.

At last Johnny unfolded his arms and raised his whip so that all the *gorgio* stopped chattering and listened for the wisdom of the Great People.

"Let those who have some knowledge of the Fire and the Iron step forward," said Johnny, with the kindness in his voice.

An old *gorgio* and a young one came from the crowd, and the young one kept his eyes on the Executive's daughter standing beside me, although he should have had eyes only for Johnny Petulengro, king among the Great People.

Johnny asked the older *gorgio*. "Can you make nails?"

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"Yes, King. I have learned a little from the Great People. I can even make needles for sewing the Old Cloth."

"Good. Now then, attend." Johnny knelt and smoothed the dust with his hand; then he began drawing with a twig. "What you will make is neither nail nor needle but something like both. Very thin — like a thread of iron. An eye at this end. Curved into a hook, with a barb, so. This you can file sharp, if you have a file."

"I have a file-stone, O King."

"It will do. Make as many as you can, for each will secure you a duck. You catch fish?"

"With nets and sometimes by hand, O King."

"After the ducks, these hooks are also good for fish. Attend. Put a bit of worm on each hook. Fasten long, strong threads to the hooks, and fasten the other end of the threads to the ground. Let the baited hooks lie in the shallows. The ducks will seize them in their beaks and swallow them; then when they try to rise in flight they are held by the threads. Kill them quickly, for they are our brothers and must not suffer long. Understood? Recover the hooks and you can use them for catching fish. Thus it was in the ancient times and thus it will be." He stood up, smiling. "The King makes an end of speaking."

The *gorgios* crowded in, full of wonder and delight, all talking at once as is the habit of the *gorgio*. Only the Executive's girl held back, standing close to me, and beside her the young *gorgio* who claimed he was a smith. And now his eyes were not upon the girl but upon me, and there was great anger in them.

To the girl he said, "Thene, I wish to speak to you all by yourself."

This was the first time I had heard the name of the girl, and it was to me like the sound of summer wind, and I knew that the love was growing in me.

She said nothing at first, and then spoke in a sharp whisper: "Later. Can't you see that it was I who spoke first to the king and the king's son? Don't be a droop."

At that moment there came toward us from the caravan Marili, the woman betrothed to Johnny, who was a widower nearly at the end of his year of sorrow. She was tall, with hair like the black glass one finds in the blistered places, and when she drew near Johnny he turned and they spoke with eyes, as the Rom speak of love, not with many words in the *gorgio* fashion. After that Marili looked at me and at the girl Thene, and the wisdom of the Great People told her that I had been caught in love with this *gorgio* girl.

She bent toward me. "If you want that girl you will have to fight the young smith for her, Fedar," she whispered.

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"I will fight for her, Marili."

"You will have a stronger enemy than the *gorgio* smith, Fedar. You will have the village-spirit to fight. It will try to trap you."

And I was silent, for I had been gazing at the *gorgio* houses and something old in me awoke and longed for the house-life with tamed flowers in the yard and a roof from the rains covering a space larger than the inside of a *vardo*, a place where a man could take off his boots and be at ease. A true Rom would not feel such foolish desires, and I was ashamed and hung my head. But I watched Thene out of the corners of my eyes.

That night we camped in a nearby field; the *gorgio* brought us wood for our fires and buckets of spring water. Our women cooked the chickens over the fires, and after we had fed, Johnny Petulengro sent Old Anna to get his *bosh*.

The *bosh* of Johnny Petulengro was so old that no man, even of the Great People, knew when it was made. At the top of the neck, above the pegs which held the strings, was carved a hand with a finger pointing, which was the symbol of the Great Wisdom unknown to the *gorgio*, the one word by which the Great People live. Johnny took the bow and tuned the strings, and then the music of the Romany sprang out of the night, and the woods listened to the sounds drawn forth from the ancient *bosh* by Johnny Petulengro, the king.

I leaned against the trunk of a tree, back from the firelight, and tears slipped down my face for joy and pride in the Romany music. Then I felt someone beside me and it was Thene, the *gorgio* girl.

"Prince of the Rom," she said softly, "what is your name?"

"My name is Fedar." And in the light of our fires I could see that her eyes held the love. I took her by the hand and led her into the darkness, where I kissed for the first time in my life. And with that kiss another portion of the wisdom of the Great People was revealed to me, and I understood more of the music of the *bosh*.

We stayed at this *gorgio* village for six days, and ate of the wild duck and the fish which the *gorgio* caught with the hooks. Thene's house was the largest in the village. Its roof was made of very ancient stuff, from before the Great War of Burning, and where it had come loose her father had put on slabs of birch bark as the Romany had taught him. In the kitchen Thene's mother cooked on a strange table made of iron, feeding small sticks under an iron grid, and a hood had been made to carry the smoke from the fire out into the air through a hole high up in the wall. When garments were soiled, the Executive's wife did not take them to the brook and weight them down with stones and let the running water wash them clean in the

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Romany way; instead she placed them in an iron kettle on legs and with much labor turned the paddles in the kettle round and round. In the ancient times the Power of the *gorgio* had come out of the walls, and the *gorgio* did no work at all, so the tale goes, but merely pushed a button and the great Power was their slave. But after the Burning there was no Power, and the people perished, all but a few who were shown by the Romany how to get food with their hands. Yet still the people used the machines of the Power, for this was Civilization-as-we-know-it, which is the religion of the *gorgio*.

All this I remembered from when I was small, for I was born in a *gorgio* house. My father had loved my mother enough to make her forsake the Great Life and live within house walls; and she had carried water from the spring, for his sake, upstairs to fill the tanks so that he could have water by turning a handle. This was great and needless labor, but she had not mocked, for she loved my father and he lived by Civilization-as-we-know-it.

But the great disaster came to my father's village. We turned up the soil with an ancient implement venerated by the *gorgio* which ran on its own iron road, over and over the wheels. And behind it came a device of iron prongs which dug the ground. All the men and women, straining on ropes made of the Old Cloth, labored to pull the venerated machine and the plow hitched behind it, and so we broke the earth for the grain. But the machine died. No one knew why, though all the village Junior Executives debated it for many nights. There was a sound of clanging iron, and the tread on one side parted, and though the people strained at their ropes the machine would move no more.

Then the Heartsickness settled upon our village. My mother had lived so long between walls that it infected her, too. My father sat at the table with his head in his hands, and would not eat, and when I spoke to him he would stretch out his hand to touch my hair but could not speak. So, at last, he died. And my mother's eyes grew dull and she took me with her and set out in search for the Great People.

Then, after three days in the cold, she said to me: "Find the Rom, Fedar. I can go no farther. Never forget — you are named for a great king of the *gorgios;* a king who could not walk but was a valiant fighter. He led his people, so the story tells, out of a great hunger and through a mighty war. And then, on the eve of victory, he died. Never forget, Fedar, that the *gorgio* have had their heroes too. Now leave me, son, and find the Rom." Then, lying beside the road, she died of the Heartsickness.

I buried her, cutting the sod with my knife, and after it was done I scratched my wrist with the knife point and let a drop of blood fall upon the grave so that no matter how far I might wander over the world there would be an unseen thread which could guide me back to that grave again.

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So I went on, the *gorgio* in me faint and despairing, pulling me down towards death, but the Rom in me coming to life with a wild joy because the road lay before me. When I found the Great People at last it was by the light of their fires in the darkness, and by the sound of the *bosh*, telling the Great Story of the Romany under the fingers of King Johnny Petulengro.

Now, feeding with Thene and her folk, my heart was sore in me as it had never been when I was free on the roads. For my father's thoughts rose in me, and he had been a *gorgio* and a worshiper of the walled life of Civilization-as-we-know-it.

Under the table I felt for Thene's hand and pressed it, and my love filled the room; the older people were silent with it, Thene's mother crying without making a sound.

That night I scratched at the *vardo* of Johnny Petulengro and his voice said, "Come in, son." For he could tell by the scratch of a fingernail or the breaking of a twig under a boot who had made that noise.

"I wish to mate with the *gorgio* girl," I said, whispering so as not to wake Old Anna.

Johnny pulled on his boots and stepped outside and we sat on the grass under the stars. And Johnny gazed up at the stars so long that I could not keep still but began to pick grass blades and plait them for something to do. Finally he said, "Fedar — it is not given to all to follow the Great Life. If the love is strong enough, it might be worth living within walls to enjoy. Follow your heart. Marili will bear me sons and daughters, and I shall have them to teach, and all will be well. But I shall weep for you, Fedar, for you are my son and you will be dead to me."

And I ran away in the darkness, stumbling over stones and tripping on roots, for my eyes were full of tears.

So I remained in the *gorgio* village, and made it known that I was to mate with Thene. And since I was of the Great People none opposed me, except the young smith, whose name was Klem.

By now the grain in the fields was ready for the mowing, and the great reaper, which was the chief treasure of the village, was drawn out from under its roof and stripped of its covering of the Old Cloth. All the village turned out to pull it as its blades turned, cutting the wheat.

Thene and I took our places side by side with the shoulder loops over our shoulders, and in the heat of the sun the sweat glistened on her temples and on her upper lip and ran in rivulets down her bare legs; and love lent me strength for the hauling, there beside her.

On the second day, as I was going to the spring with two pails to bring water to the Executive's house that it might run from the taps, a shadow came up from behind me. It was the young smith.

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He had hair of a reddish color, and blue eyes; and he held himself straight, with anger in him. He said, "Gypsy — or half-gypsy, or whatever you be — drop them pails. Don't think we ain't grateful for what your folks showed us. But this settlement ain't big enough for both of us. Now you can head for the road and start walking, or you can head for me and start punching."

He was larger than I; and I saw the bulge of his upper arm against the Old Cloth of his tunic. I moved slowly to get the sun in his eyes, as the custom is in fighting. As I drew near to him he closed his fingers into fists, in the manner of the *gorgio* who cannot help signaling what they will do next.

I said, "I shall take Thene for my wife."

At this his left foot came forward. I ducked, and his left fist passed over my head, and I threw mine into his belly with all my strength. But he was wise for a *gorgio*, and had tightened his belly muscles. He gripped me by the shoulders and pushed me back; then his fist caught me on the cheek, and there was a leaping of light and a ringing and I was lying on the ground. I knew that the ancient custom of the *gorgio* is to count slowly to ten at such times, so I waited for him to start counting so that I could take breath. But anger had seized his heart and blotted out the reverence for Civilization-as-we-know-it, and he leaped on me and knelt astride of me, drawing back his fist to smash me in the face. Having broken the *gorgio* code, he was without the Law and I could fight my own way.

I seized him by the arms, feeling with my thumbs for the nerves, and rolled him off me. Then I whirled behind him and slid my arm across his throat, locking it with my other arm against his head.

"Give up, *gorgio*, or I shall cut off your breath."

"Go to hell, gypsy."

So I tightened my hold and he went limp.

Then I turned him over and pressed his ribs and soon he muttered and opened his eyes. He sat up and gazed at me and I saw anger flare up in him again. His hand went inside his tunic and came out with a knife. I had left my knife in the house.

"Gypsy, I'm going to cut your gizzard out."

As he rose toward me with the knife I turned, as if to run away. But instead I fell forward on my hands and kicked with both feet like a frightened horse; my feet caught him in the belly. I heard him grunt once, and the knife fell. Then I picked Klem up and carried him over my shoulder to the edge of the village.

When the *gorgio* crowded around I said, "I have fought him for Thene. I shall fight him again, as many times as he wishes. But I shall marry Thene."

And the *gorgio* nodded their heads and got ready to slip on the shoulder

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loops of the reaper, for most of the grain was still uncut. Klem had come awake now and was lying on one elbow, breathing in gasps and rubbing his belly. In short bursts of words he said, "You just wait. Wait'll Thene . . . has a whole houseful of kids . . . by you. Then you'll run . . . back to the roads. And who'll feed . . . them kids? I ain't lying. It's true."

Then, for the first time, the *gorgio* sickness of self-doubt stirred within me, and I all but cried out with the pain of it. But when I turned to answer Klem, he was not looking at me but had his eyes on the distant sky. There, over the world's edge, was a black cloud; the lightning flashed inside it like veins of blue fire.

Klem struggled to his feet. "Wind's a-coming!" He shouted it again to the *gorgios* who were taking up the lines of the reaper. They stopped and wriggled out of their straps, and stood with their faces blank, watching the growing cloud.

Thene ran to me. "Come into the house, Fedar. Nothing we can do but wait for it to pass over. Come."

I went with her. Beneath the house there was a cellar of steel pillars, built by the ancients when they feared the Wars of the Burning, and into this cellar we descended — the Executive, his wife, his daughter, and the half-gypsy, whose heart was sick with the new sickness of doubt caught from the *gorgio*.

Outside, above our heads, the wind began to moan. No rain, only wind. It whistled and sang about the corners of the house and made a tearing sound as it ripped loose the birch bark slabs that patched the roof of Old Stuff.

Thene sat beside me and put her head against my shoulder; I bent and pressed my mouth against hers, and we gave each other our breath between our parted lips there in the darkness of the cellar, where the only light was a tiny green glow high up on the wall. It was marked Emergency Self-Power-Lite, The Adams Company, Boston, Mass. And that was the name of an ancient city but no man knows today where that city stood.

Overhead the wind voice rose to a shriek, and the house trembled as things carried by the wind struck its walls. But Thene had stopped trembling under my hands and the fierceness of my love, held in check only by the Executive and his wife sitting with sagging heads there in the green light's feeble glow.

And then it was quiet above and the wind was gone.

The village was smashed. All through the streets lay tree branches and sometimes whole trunks, uprooted and borne through the air by the mighty wind. Houses had their roofs torn off, and there were dead people sprawled

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on doorsteps, and one small girl's body wedged in the branches of a tree stripped bare of leaves.

The wheat fields were beaten flat by the force of the wind. And the reaper was destroyed, its blades twisted and crumpled.

"This is the end," said the Executive in a dragging voice as the *gorgios* gathered. "This is the end of Civilization-as-we-know-it. For the wheat is cast down, the reaper smashed beyond hope of repair. The time of despair is upon us. It is the end."

Then he turned and went into his house, which still had half a roof. And the villagers scattered, each to what was left of his house, there to wait for death as is the custom of the *gorgio* when the Heartsickness comes upon them with the failure of Civilization-as-we-know-it.

I stood with Thene's hand in mine, looking at the desolate fields, and then I heard a step behind us. It was Klem, and he carried in his arms the broken body of the young girl; he had climbed the tree and taken it down for burial. His eyes had more life than the eyes of the older villagers. "Gypsy," he said, looking fiercely at me, "I'm sorry I pulled the knife on you. I was riled up, and when you slipped that strangle-holt on me I kind of quit thinking. My belly hurts yet where you give me that mule-kick. Reckon we're quits?"

"We're quits," I said. "Take the child to her mother, and come to the Executive's house. We must talk." For a plan was forming in my mind, born of some ancient things I had observed in that cellar.

The Executive and his wife were sitting with their heads bent, waiting to die of the Heartsickness. When Klem appeared in the doorway they paid no heed. I beckoned him to the cellar, and there in the pale green glow I showed him an ancient thing, oiled and protected by a cover of Old Cloth, as the *gorgio* always protect the venerated machines whose use they have forgotten.

"Klem, "I said, "do you know what use the ancients made of such a thing?"

He shook his head. "Too old for anybody to know. But there's others in the village. I seen 'em."

The machine had two wheels connected by a length of chain; above was a cushion with springs under it and between the wheels, geared to the chain, were two angles of iron and two tiny steps.

"Klem," I said, "I think it is a machine to be worked by the weight of a man. First on one step and then the other . . . so; and the chain turns the back wheel."

There was a brief flicker of interest in Klem's eyes. "It'd work so, Fedar. I reckon it would. But look — the frame is bent, and it's snapped off."

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"You could fix it in the forge?"

"Sure thing. But even if we got a couple of these things working, what good would they do us? The reaper is plumb broke."

"It is a machine for travel," I said, more confidently than I felt. "It will take us along the road faster than we could ever walk — to find the Great People. They will tell us how to save the grain and the village."

Klem gripped me by the shoulders, and though his hair was red and his eyes blue I saw in them a fire which one seldom sees in the *gorgio*. "You've guessed it, Fedar. These things must be so old that they come from a time before the Power, and nobody recalls when that was. But there must have been a time," he paused, and even in the dim green light I could see that he was blushing at a thought which was heresy against Civilization-as-we-know it, "a time when folks traveled with no power but their own weight. On these things. Come on, Fedar, let's fix 'em. Thene can pump the bellows." And Thene laughed and slid her hands through both our arms.

That was a mighty journey we made, Klem, and I, and Thene with her brown legs flashing as we steered the ancient machines over the cracked surface of the old roads. At first we fell off many times, but after a while learned the trick of balance and began to move like the wind. That night I showed Klem how to make a bow from straight wood, and Thene was the best of us all in shooting the arrows. And as we rolled on the next day I taught Klem all the wisdom of the Romany that I knew; for he had loved Thene and now he mingled his love for her with love for me, and it was Romany, so deep and singing was his love. When we stopped for a quick meal we all felt it and fell silent. And then I took my knife point and scratched my wrist and Klem did the same and we held our wrists together so that the blood drops mingled, swearing brotherhood by the old law.

At crossroads I could read the Romany *patteran* in rocks or scratched on the ruins of houses, and knew which way Johnny Petulengro's caravan had gone. And so, that evening at dusk, I saw ahead of us in the gloaming the twinkle of fires, and my heart leaped and we pressed on. Then I heard a sound which made me shout aloud — the music, carried down the wind, of Johnny's *bosh*, telling the story of the Great People.

There were several tribes camped together, and soon, watching from the shadow, I saw Johnny pass his *bosh* to another Rom, an old fiddler. When the music spoke again Johnny leaped forward into the firelight; and Marili stepped from the other side of the fire to meet him, and there they danced with a great clapping and shouting of the Romany, and the firelight glinting on the gold coins linked in a chain round Marili's neck and the gold bracelets on her slim ankles. When at last Johnny caught the woman in his arms

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and the long cry went up and the fiddling stopped, I stepped forward.

"*Sarishan*, Johnny," I said. "I have come to your wedding."

He turned and faced me, his arm about Marili. "You are dead, son," he said hotly.

"Very well. I am a *gorgio* named Fedar. Thene here is my wife. Klem — this man — is my brother. We are come to beg the king for wisdom. The reaper is smashed, the grain is flattened; soon the rains will come and rot it. How can the grain be saved?"

Johnny pushed Marili aside and folded his arms. "What gifts do you offer, *gorgio?*"

Within me burned the fire of the Rom and I answered him with it. "There will come a time, O King, when the *gorgio* villages will be wasted by fire and storm and flood and the people all dead of the Heartsickness. And where will the poor gypsies be then, O King?"

"Aiee! The Romany in him speaks," shrilled Old Anna from the *vardo*. For I had dropped into the Great Tongue, and now the words flowed from me:

"O King, if the *gorgio* die, the Romany will die too, for no Rom can live between walls and do the same task day after day and survive. The Ancient Wisdom should be shared freely with the *gorgio*, not hoarded till they are in desperate need of it. There are some *gorgio* with strong hearts, unafraid of breaking ancient custom. If Civilization-as-we-know-it fails they will find other ways and survive. . . ." I seized Klem's elbow and drew him forward. "Here is such a *gorgio*. First I fought him for the girl, Thene. Then we swore brotherhood. Now we are one, we three."

The kindness had come back into Johnny Petulengro's eyes. Now Marili came forward, cupped Thene's face in her hand and gazed deep into her eyes. She laughed. "Johnny — here is one who could learn to dance to the *bosh*, gray-eyed and pale-haired though she is."

The old fiddler ran his bow lightly over the strings, and Thene's breasts lifted and her body swayed to the magic of the *bosh*.

The shout which went up had words in it. "Take them, Johnny. Take Fedar and his woman who braved the roads. Take them back, as son and daughter of the king."

Then the Romany swarmed about us, kissing Thene and pounding me on the shoulders, and the fires leaped with the swirl of their skirts and the ground shook with the stamping of their boots . . .

Later, tired at last, I lay with Thene asleep in my arms under Johnny's *vardo*, and I was content. In my heart was the great, surging joy of the Romany to be on the road again. For Johnny, kneeling in the firelight, had drawn in the dust the shape of a curving blade with a handle, with which

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a man could cut the grain by hand. And Klem was waiting only for daylight to turn back to the village, with the wisdom of the new way of harvesting in his mind and also the wisdom I had taught him on the road.

There was a chirrup like a cricket, repeated three times. I looked about and saw no one; then I heard the soft laughter of Old Anna. "Fedar, darling — leave thy bride for a moment. Old Anna has a word for thee."

I eased Thene's head from my shoulder and crawled out from under the *vardo* to where Anna sat crouched.

She whispered in Romany. "Fedar — when first my grandson took thee for son, I knew the time of the Change was at hand. It always comes. First the Romany are kings. Then they teach the *gorgio*. The *gorgio* become kings; they grow proud, they try to crush the Great People. Then they destroy themselves. The Great People come back as kings of the roads to teach the *gorgio* again — the fishhook, the sickle, all the old ways by which a man can live a life. It is always so."

The truth began to grow in my heart and I could hardly speak. "You mean — it has happened before?"

Anna laughed without sound. "Over and over. For the Romany are the masters of the road, of the fire, the iron, the hammer, the wheel. Always the *gorgio* take our wisdom and destroy themselves, and then the remnants of them have the Heartsickness. For they know not the Word of the old wisdom by which the Romany live."

I held my breath, waiting, with the skin of my scalp tight.

"Look you, darling — straight overhead, before the dawn sends them away. What do you see?"

Faint in the paling sky they still shone and flickered, cold, mysterious, and remote. "The stars."

"Ai. And there is the home of the Romany, Fedar. Ages ago, more years than there are specks of dust on the road, we came out of the sky in *vardos* of iron. And here we found the *gorgio*, who knew not fire nor iron nor the wheel nor any useful thing. They had fingers like ours and slowly they learned and then suddenly they began to learn quickly, ever making new and more wonderful things. That was when they built their world. And the gypsies became tinkers."

"And it will happen again?"

"Ai. It is the way. Before the Great Burning did not the iron *vardos* of the *gorgio*, fish-shaped and with fire spouting from their tails, launch out toward the stars?"

"What did they find, Grandmother?" I whispered.

Her silent laughter filled the night again. "Eh? Eh? What did they find? I'll tell thee, darling, what they found if they lived to land there." She

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gripped my arm, her old eyes shining in the glow of fire embers far across the camp ground. "They found the Romany road. And the gypsy folk living on it somehow, somewhere. For the Romany were the first men, made when the world was made. And they will not die. They will go on forever, in this world or another; in this age or another. For they carry in their hearts the Word of Wisdom. And the Word is *Survive!* Silly child — you knew it all along."

The Vampire

I'm the lovely lady from the folk-tale —
Flap, flap, flap, here I come —
To hang by my fang
In the great gray fog.
When you can't get a man, buy a dog.
(Get a male.)

Left all alone, so I cry —
Squeak, squeak, squeak, like a bat —
I need blood underneath
My sharp front teeth.
For a true friend I can get a cat.
(Not a mate.)

Suddenly I swoop from the sky —
Slurp, slurp, slurp, yum yum —
It's the throat of a shoat;
He is fat, he is small,
But he's better than no one at all.
(I can wait.
Get a male, not a mate,
For the lovely lady from the folk-tale.)

WINONA MCCLINTIC

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*Besides writing half-dozen novels a year, editing as many anthologies, running assorted columns of book reviews and producing an incredible number of short stories and poems, Mr. August Derleth is the literary agent in this country for such writers as Stephen Grendon, H. Russell Wakefield and Lyndon Parker, M.D. Dr. Parker is the Boswell of that modern master of the science of deduction, Mr. Solar Pons, the famed consulting detective of 7B Praed Street, London. Mr. Derleth has marketed three volumes of the Doctor's accounts of his friend's triumphs: "*IN RE: SHERLOCK HOLMES,*" THE MEMOIRS OF SOLAR PONS *and* THREE PROBLEMS FOR SOLAR PONS *(all published by Mycroft & Moran) — a criminously delightful trio that any reader will, as Vincent Starrett says, "accept with enthusiasm." In a foreword to* THREE PROBLEMS, *Mr. Derleth sadly announced that Dr. Parker had, for personal reasons, decided to terminate his literary career. However, a kindly Fate has intervened to upset these plans of agent and author. A Mr. Mack Reynolds, while browsing in the archives of certain space-time continua, stumbled on a cryptic reference (in a most unlikely era) to Mr. Solar Pons. Careful research elicited the broad outlines of what is possibly the greatest triumph of the Pontine powers. Mr. Reynolds consulted Mr. Derleth; Mr. Derleth conferred with Dr. Parker; so persuasive was the agent (as agents should be) that the good Doctor was prevailed upon to give us one more adventure, the complete story of the one truly science fictional problem ever faced by the great detective.*

The Adventure of the Snitch in Time

by MACK REYNOLDS
and AUGUST DERLETH

(Being a recently discovered, hitherto unpublished reminiscence of Dr. Lyndon Parker, of 7B Praed Street, London.)

ON AN AUTUMN afternoon of a year that, for manifest reasons, must remain nameless, there came to the attention of my friend, Mr. Solar Pons, a matter which was surely either the most extraordinary adventure ever to befall a

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private enquiry agent in or before our time, or an equally extraordinary misadventure, the *raison d'être* of which remains obscure even now, though it might have been born in the circumstances of the moment, for it was one of those days on which London was literally swallowed in a yellow fog, and we had both been confined to our quarters for two days, with no more incident than the arrival of an occasional paper and the unfailing complaint of our long-suffering landlady about Pons' spare appetite.

Even our warm and comfortable quarters, for all that a fire burned at the hearth, had begun to pall on us. Pons had exhausted the microscope; he had abandoned his chemistry set; he had ceased his abominable pistol practice; and for once there was not a single item of correspondence transfixed to the center of the mantelpiece by his knife. He had hardly stopped his restless wandering among the disorderly order of our quarters, and seated himself in his velvet-lined chair, holding forth on the points of difference between Stradivarius and Amati violins, when he rose once more with his empty pipe in his hands.

He was at the fireplace, about to take the shag from the toe of his slipper, tacked below the mantelpiece, when suddenly, he paused. He stood so for a moment, in utter silence, his hawklike face keen with interest, his body seeming actually to lean forward as if to catch the sound that smote upon his ears.

"If I am not mistaken, Parker," he said with unaccustomed gravity, "we are about to have a most unusual visitor."

I had been standing at the window looking out, and had just turned. "Nothing has disturbed this fog for the past half hour," I protested.

"My dear Parker, you are looking in the wrong direction. The footsteps are approaching from out there, and a little above."

So saying, he turned to face the door with alert expectation in his gray eyes.

I had for some time been conscious of a curious sound, almost as of water sliding at regular intervals against the roof. Apparently this was what Pons had mistaken for the sound of footsteps. Almost at the same moment of this realization, a most peculiar assault was made on the door to our quarters. I had not heard the outer door; in truth, I had heard no step upon the stair. But now a kind of brushing sound broke in upon us; it began at the top of the door, and did not become a recognizable knock until it had descended to midpanel.

Being nearest the door, I moved to open it.

"Pray be cautious, Parker," said Pons. "And spare me your alarm. Unless I am in egregrious error, our visitor is from another world."

I gazed at him, mouth agape. I had heard and marveled at his extraordi-

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nary deductions before, but this came from his lips with such calm assurance that I could not doubt his sincerity even while I could not accept his words.

"Come, Parker, let us not keep him waiting."

I threw open the door. There, confronting us, was a strong, healthy man, bronzed by the sun, clad in a fantastic attire of such brilliant hues as to dazzle the eye. His footgear — a strange combination of sandal and slipper — must have made the curious slapping sounds I had at first mistaken for the dripping of water, but which Pons had correctly identified as footsteps, however alien to our previous experience.

Our visitor looked briefly at me and said, "Ah, the famous literary doctor, I presume?" and smiled, as if in jest.

My astonishment at this manner of address, accompanied as it was with an almost insolent amusement, left me momentarily speechless.

"Come in, come in, my dear fellow," said Pons behind me. "Pray overlook Dr. Parker's rudeness. I perceive you have come a long way; your fatigue is manifest. Sit here and relieve yourself of the problem which brings you to these quarters."

Our visitor walked into the room, inclining his head to acknowledge Pons' invitation.

"I hope you will forgive my coming without an appointment," he said, in a somewhat stilted voice, accompanied by florid and Victorian gestures. "I fear I had no alternative. Let me introduce myself — I am Agent Tobias Athelney of the Terra Bureau of Investigation, Planet Terra, of the Solar System League."

Pons' eyes twinkled merrily.

"My dear sir," I could not help interrupting, "levity is all very well, but this is neither the time nor the place for it. Just where are you from?"

Our visitor had taken the seat to which Pons had waved him. At my words, he stopped short, took a small, violet-covered notebook from an inner fold of his robelike costume, and thumbed through it until he found the place he sought.

"Pray forgive me," he murmured. "If we were still using your somewhat fantastic calendar system, it would be the year 2565 A.D."

Pons, who had been scrutinizing him closely, now leaned back, closed his eyes, and touched his fingertips together. "So you represent yourself as a governmental agent of almost 700 years in the future, Mr. Athelney?" he said. "A traveler in time?"

Our visitor grimaced. "Not exactly, Mr. Pons. To my knowledge, there is no such thing as time travel, or can such travel ever be developed. No, the explanation for my presence here is more elementary. We have recently discovered that the universe is not, indeed, one, but of an infinite number.

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We have learned that everything that possibly *could* happen *has* happened, *will* happen, and *is* happening. Given an infinite number of alternative universes, you can easily understand how this would be so. To illustrate, Mr. Pons, there are alternate space-time continua in which Napoleon won at Waterloo; there are still others in which Waterloo was a draw; and there are yet others in which the battle was never fought at all — indeed, in which Napoleon was never born!"

I flashed a glance of mounting indignation at Pons, but my companion's face had taken on that dream expression I had learned to associate with intense concentration. Surely it could not be that he was being deceived by this patent mountebank!

"Infinite other universes than this," murmured Pons, "containing other persons identical to myself, and to Dr. Parker, here, who carry on their little lives in much the same manner as we do?"

Our visitor nodded. "That is correct, Mr. Pons. There are still other space-time continua, in which there are no such persons as yourselves, never have been, and never will be." He coughed almost apologetically. "In fact, in this multitude of alternate universes, Mr. Pons, there are some in which you two are fictitious characters, the product of a popular writer's art!"

"Amazing!" exclaimed Pons, adding, with a glance at my dour face, "and yet, not entirely incredible, would you say, Parker?"

"Preposterous!" I answered. "How can you sit there and calmly accept this — this nonsense?"

"Dear me," murmured Pons, "let us not be too hasty, Parker."

"I am sorry to have upset Dr. Parker," said our visitor soberly, "but it is from just such a universe that I have traveled to this. Approximately 700 years before my birth, in my space-time continuum, a series of stories dealing with Mr. Solar Pons and Dr. Lyndon Parker were written, presumably by Dr. Parker, and became the all-time favorites of the literature of deduction."

"Let us assume all this is so," said Pons. "For what purpose have you come?"

"To consult you, Mr. Pons."

"I fancied as much," said my companion with a serene smile. "Though it would seem a long chance indeed to consult a fictitious character."

"Touché!" answered our client. "But a fictitious character in *my* universe and 700 years before my time. But in *this* universe you are very real indeed, and the greatest detective of all time!" He sighed. "You cannot imagine, Mr. Pons, the difficulty of first finding a continuum in which you were *real*, and then, on top of that, one in which you were contemporary."

Pons sat for a moment in silence, stroking the lobe of his left ear. "I submit," he said at last, "since patterns of crime and its detection contin-

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ually evolve, you are haunting the wrong continuum, Mr. Athelney."

"I think not, Mr. Pons, if you will hear me out."

"Proceed."

"One of our most scientifically advanced bands of criminals is named the Club Cerise, after the favorite color of its leader, Moriarty. They —"

"Moriarty!" exclaimed Pons.

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Moriarty. The name is familiar to you perhaps?"

"Indeed it is!" Pons was silent for a moment, his eyes closed. "You know, Parker," he said after a moment, "I have always felt that one death at the Reichenbach was as false as the other." He sat up in his chair, his gaze now intent on our visitor. "Pray continue, Mr. Athelney! Where my illustrious predecessor could achieve but a stalemate, it seems that you offer me the opportunity for complete victory!"

"Well, then, Mr. Pons," our visitor resumed, "you will not be surprised to learn that Moriarty and his band have managed to escape retribution for some time, and it is in regard to their apprehension that I seek your assistance. The criminal method they have developed is based on the same discovery that allows my presence here. Moriarty and his Club Cerise have been making a practice of invading space-time continua in less developed eras than our own, and, utilizing our most advanced weapons and devices to assure their escape, have been despoiling these universes of their art treasures. Not long ago, for example, they went into a Twentieth Century universe and obtained a Da Vinci, a half dozen Rembrandts, and a priceless collection of Kellys."

Pons' eyes widened a trifle. "You are suggesting that the Irish have developed an artist of the stature of Da Vinci, Mr. Athelney?"

"Indeed, yes. A fellow named Kelly created a work of genius called *Pogo*, which appeared in hundreds of newspapers of his day. These were *Pogo* originals, including some of the very rare pre-strip drawings. With his fabulously valuable treasure, Moriarty and his band managed to return to our own space-time continuum. Obviously, we cannot punish them in our universe, since they have committed no crime there. Under ordinary circumstances, it would be possible to extradite them to the universe they plundered — but there are almost insurmountable complications."

Pons smiled, still giving no evidence of being in the slightest troubled by the mad, if ingenious, account of our prospective client. "I daresay 'insurmountable' is the word to describe the problems attendant upon extradition of a group of criminals from a country which doesn't exist in the universe where the crime was committed. I submit that a Twentieth Century nation might be compelled to adopt extraordinary protective measures — if indeed these would be adequate — to deal with criminals seven centuries

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in advance of the police of that period." But now he shook his head, with a gentle smile on his thin lips. "But we must stop considering these ramifications, or we shall soon find ourselves involved in the higher mathematics of space and time."

"The importance of the problem is greater than might at first be evident," continued our visitor. "Given continued success on the part of Moriarty and his Club Cerise, there can be no doubt that other such bands will soon emulate them, and that eventually endless numbers of space-time pirates will give up other pursuits to devote themselves to the plundering of weaker continua with this type of snitch.'

"Snitch?" I repeated.

"Elementary, Parker," murmured Pons impatiently. "Obviously idiomatic for 'theft'."

"The ultimate possibility will not have escaped you, Mr. Pons," continued our client. "Sooner or later, the increasing numbers of criminals would arrive in *this* space-time continuum and in *this* era."

I could not be sure, but it seemed to me that at this suggestion a little color drained from Pons' cheeks. And, if a shudder went through that lean frame, he was again under perfect control within moments. He sat then in silence, his eyes closed, his head sunk to his chest with his fingertips gently tapping together.

Our visitor waited in silence.

Pons opened his eyes presently and asked, "Pray tell me, Mr. Athelney — do you have income taxes in your world?"

Athelney groaned. "My dear fellow, last year my taxes were unbelievably high. Bureaucracy runs rampant!"

"Capital, capital!" exclaimed Pons. "Why not prosecute Moriarty for tax evasion?"

Our visitor shook his head dolefully. "The criminals of our days are advanced, Mr. Pons. They *pay* their taxes."

Once again Pons retreated into silence, taking time now to light up his calabash. But this time his silence was broken more quickly.

"I have some modest knowledge of British law, Mr. Athelney," said Pons, "but your laws may well differ. What type of social system prevails in your world and time?"

"It is usually referred to as Industrial Feudalism."

"I am not familiar with the term, though I can guess its meaning. Pray elucidate."

"In the same manner that Feudalism evolved from Chattel Slavery, and Capitalism from Feudalism, so Industrial Feudalism has evolved in our continuum from Capitalism. Ownership has contracted until a few princes

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of finance, a few industrial barons and lords of transportation completely control the government and practically all the wealth."

"Do national boundaries still prevail?"

"Terra is united, but we have loose ties with the other planets of the Solar System."

"Then doubtless you have tariff laws between the various planets."

"Very rigid ones. Last month we apprehended some Martians smuggling duppl berries; they were given ten years."

"I submit you have an obvious trap in which to take Moriarty and his Club Cerise, Mr. Athelney. They must pay import taxes on those art objects. Failure to do so puts them afoul of the law."

Our client smiled broadly. "I do believe, Mr. Pons, you have arrived at a solution of our problem."

He came to his feet.

"I suggest your government pass such tariff restrictions as to make imports from other space-time continua prohibitive. Such a move, in view of the fact that the criminals of your time are so advanced as to pay their taxes, would in all likelihood prevent further depredations."

Though our client was manifestly anxious to be off, he hesitated. "I wish there were some way in which I could remunerate you, Mr. Pons. Unfortunately, we do not use the same system of exchange. All I can do is offer profound thanks in the name of my continuum."

"There is surely remuneration enough implied in the promise that we will not be victimized here in our time and world by such as Moriarty," said Pons. "But, stay, Mr. Athelney — I perceive you are still troubled by some aspect of the matter."

Our client turned from the threshold, to which he had walked. He smiled wryly. "I fear, Mr. Pons, that this is but the initial step in our problem. Moriarty, when he learned I was to travel hither in search of the greatest detective of all time, took certain protective measures. He sent one of his own men to another space-time continuum to acquire the services of a most astute lawyer named Randolph Mason."

"Pray be reassured," responded Pons instantly. "I can refer you to a rising young contemporary, who promises to be even greater, and is gaining a challenging reputation in the legal circles of his world. By an odd coincidence, not uncommon to fiction, he bears a similar family name. His given name, I believe, is Perry. My correspondents on the west coast of the United States have given me flattering reports of his talents. You will find him in Los Angeles, I believe. I commend him to your government. Good afternoon, Mr. Athelney."

As soon as the door had closed behind our visitor, I turned to Pons.

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"Should not one of us slip after him and notify the authorities of his escape?"

Pons walked to the window and looked out into the fog. Without turning, he asked, "You thought him a lunatic, Parker?"

"Surely that was obvious!"

"Was it, indeed!" Pons shook his head. "I sometimes think, Parker, that that happy faculty for observation which seems to come so readily to me encounters obstacles of demoralizing stubbornness in you."

"Pons!" I exclaimed hotly, "you cannot have been taken in by this — this mountebank and his hoax?"

"Was he both lunatic and mountebank, then?" asked Pons, smiling in that superior manner which always galled me.

"What does it matter which he was? He was certainly one or the other."

"If a mountebank, what was his motive? If a lunatic, how did he find his way here in this fog, which is surely as thick as any we have ever had? I fear some of us have an unhappy tendency to dismiss the incredible solely because it is incredible to *us*. Tell me, Parker, have you ever contemplated setting forth in the form of fiction these little adventures of mine in the field of ratiocination?"

I hesitated to answer.

"Come, come, Parker, it is evident that you have."

"I confess, I have thought of it."

"You have not yet done so?"

"No, Pons, I swear it."

"You have spoken of your plans to no one?"

"No."

"Our late client spoke of you as a literary doctor. 'The famous literary doctor' were his exact words, I believe. If he were but a lunatic or mountebank, as you will have him, how came he then to know of your innermost hope and ambition in this regard? Or is there some secret communion between lunatics and mountebanks? I perceive, thanks to our Mr. Athelney that, without regard to my wishes, you are destined to become a literary man at the expense of my modest powers."

"Pons, I swear I have never put pen to paper," I cried.

"But you will, Parker, you will. May I remind you of my distinguished predecessor's credo, that when all possible explanations have been shown false, the impossible, no matter how incredible, alone remains? This, I fancy, is one little adventure you will not be able to chronicle without a furtive blush or two."

In this, at least, my companion was correct.

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The name of John Anthony has never appeared before in print, but under another name he is a professor of English, the executive editor of a publishing house and a widely recognized poet who has been described by Robert Frost as "one of the hopes of American poetry." Reviewers of poetry being the shortsighted and toplofty characters that they are, Mr. Anthony feels it prudent to adopt a new by-line for this venture into science fiction, but he brings with him a poet's precision with words and a hypnotic quality precisely suiting his subject — which is something completely new and terrifyingly believable in the way of threats from outer space.

The Hypnoglyph

by JOHN ANTHONY

JARIS HELD THE object cupped in his hand while his thumb stroked the small hollow in its polished side. "It's really the prize of my collection," he said, "but there isn't any real name for it. I call it the hypnoglyph."

"Hypnoglyph?" Maddick said, putting down a superbly rick-racked Venusian opal the size of a goose egg.

Jaris smiled at the younger man. "Hypnoglyph," he said. "Here, take a look at it."

Maddick held it in his palm stroking it softly, letting his thumb run gently over the little hollow. "This, the prize of your collection?" he said. "Why, it's nothing but a chunk of wood."

"A man," Jaris said, "may be described as not much more than a chunk of meat, but he has some unusual properties."

Maddick, his thumb still stroking the little hollow, swept his eye over the treasure room. "I'll say he has. I've never in my life seen more property in one room."

Jaris' voice gently brushed aside the edge of greed in the younger man's voice. "It has not been the longest life to date. Perhaps it even has something left to learn."

Maddick flushed a moment, then pursed his lips almost imperceptibly and shrugged. "Well, what's it for?" he said. He held the thing in front of him and watched his fingers stroke it.

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Jaris chuckled again. "It's for exactly what you're doing. The thing is irresistible. Once you've picked it up, your thumb just automatically strokes that little hollow, and it just automatically hates to stop stroking."

Maddick's voice took on the tone that the very young reserve for humoring the very old. "It's a pleasant gadget," he said. "But why the rather pretentious name?"

"Pretentious?" Jaris said. "I had simply thought of it as descriptive. The thing actually is hypnotic." He smiled watching Maddick's fingers still playing with the thing. "You may recall a sculptor named Gainsdale who fooled with such things toward the end of the Twentieth Century. He founded a school of sculpture called Tropism."

Maddick shrugged, still absorbed in the object. "Everyone and his brother started a school of something back there; I guess I missed that one."

"It was an interesting theory," Jaris said, picking up an Arcturian space-crystal and watching the play of light rays from it. "He argued — soundly enough as I see it — that the surface of every organism has certain innate tactile responses. A cat innately likes to be stroked in certain ways. A heliotrope innately moves to face the light."

"And the leg," Maddick quipped, "innately likes to be pulled. So far we've covered some basic facts about tropism with a small *t*. What of it?"

"It isn't the facts so much as the application that's interesting," Jaris said, ignoring the younger man's rudeness. "Gainsdale simply carried his awareness of tropism farther than any one had before. Anyone on earth at least. He argued that every surface of the body innately responds to certain shapes and textures and he set out to carve objects that — as he put it — made the bodily surfaces innately happy. He made objects for rubbing up and down the neck, objects for rubbing across the forehead. He even claimed he could cure headaches that way."

"That's nothing but old Chinese medicine," Maddick said. "I bought an Eighth Century talisman for rubbing out rheumatism just last week. Curio stuff."

"Gainsdale must certainly have known the Oriental glyptics," Jaris agreed, "but he was trying to systematize the idea behind them into a series of principals. He took a fling at reviving the Japanese netsuke, those polished hand-pieces the old Samurais dangled from their belts. But Gainsdale wanted to carve for the whole body. He tried psychic jewelry at one point and designed bracelets that innately pleased the arm. For a while he got to designing chairs that were irresistible to the buttocks."

"Quite an art," Maddick said, turning the object in his hand, working the little hollow around and around in his fist and then bringing it back to where his thumb could stroke along the tiny hollow. "You might say he

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got right down to fundaments." He smiled at Jaris as if looking for acknowledgment of his wit, but found no response there.

"He was, in fact, quite a man," Jaris said seriously. "Maybe the chairs and buttocks gave him the idea but after that he got to experimenting with gimmicks that would preserve sexual potency. The League of Something or Other made him stop that, but it is worth noting that his last child was born when he was 84."

Maddick leered. "At last — a practical application!"

Jaris looked down at Maddick's hand still stroking the hypnoglyph, the fingers moving as if they had entered a life of their own. "After that," he said, ignoring Maddick's still lingering leer, "he got to designing sleeping blocks — wooden pillows something like the Japanese porcelain block, but molded to give the head pleasure. He claimed it produced good dreams. But most of all he sculptured for the hand, just as the Japanese carvers of talismans finally settled on the netsuke for their definitive work. After all the hand is not only the natural tactile organ in one sense; it also has the kind of mobility that can respond to texture and mass most pleasurably."

Jaris put down the space-crystal and stood watching Maddick's hand. "Just as you're doing," he said. "Gainsdale was after the object the human hand could not resist."

Maddick looked down at the thing in his hand, the fingers working over it as if they were alone with it somewhere apart from the arm and mind they grew from. "I must say it is pleasant," he said. "But isn't all this just a bit far-fetched? You'd hardly argue that pleasure is absolutely irresistible. If we have no control over our lust for pleasure why aren't we strangling one another for the pleasure of stroking this thing?"

"Maybe," Jaris said gently, "because I want less than you do."

Maddick let his eyes sweep the treasure room. "Maybe you can damn well afford to," he said, and for a moment there was no suavity in his voice. He seemed to be aware of the gaff himself, for he changed the subject immediately. "But I thought you collected nothing but extraterrestrial stuff. How come this?"

"That," said Jaris, "is the curious coincidence. Or one of the curious coincidences. The one you're holding *is* extraterrestrial."

"And the other curious coincidences?" Maddick said.

Jaris lit one of his poisonous cheroots. "I might as well begin at the beginning," he said through the smoke.

"Something told me there was a story coming," Maddick said. "You collectors are all alike. I've never known one that wasn't a yarn spinner. I think it's the real reason for the collection."

Jaris smiled. "A professional disease. Do we collect so we can tell yarns,

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or tell yarns so we can collect? Maybe if I tell the yarn well enough I'll collect you. Well, sit down and I'll do my best: a new audience, a new opportunity."

He waved Maddick into an elaborately carved bone chair, placed the humidor, the drug sachets, and a decanter of Danubian brandy within easy reach of him, and sat down behind the desk with a wave of the hand that told Maddick to help himself.

"I suppose," he said after that pause-before-the-yarn that no story teller can omit, "I suppose one of the reasons I prize the thing is because I got it on my last blast into deep space. As you see," he added, waving his hand about him lightly, "I made the mistake of coming back rich, and it killed the wanderlust. Now I'm earthbound by my own avidity."

Maddick sat stroking the smooth little hollow with his thumb. "Being filthy rich is hardly the worst fate imaginable, I should think."

But Jaris' mind was on his story. "I'd been prospecting for space-crystals out toward Deneb Kaitos," he continued, "and I'd really struck bonanza, an asteroid belt just popping with the luscious things. We had the ship bulging with enough of them to buy Terra twice over, and we were starting back when we found that Deneb Kaitos had a planetary system. There had been several expeditions out that way before with no mention of the system and we had been so busy hauling in space-crystals that we hadn't been doing much looking. But I realized then that what I had thought was just an asteroid belt was really a broken-up planet orbiting around its sun. With the fragments running about 8 per cent pure diamond it was no wonder we'd hit the mother lode of them all.

"We ran a quick survey on the system and decided to put into DK-8 for the specimen run-over and life-forms data. DK-6 gave some indications of life-forms but hardly enough to be worth the extra stop. DK-8, on the other hand, ran high. So high it looked like a good chance for Federation Prize Money. With a ship load of space-crystals, even a million Units seemed small change, but it would be a kick to turn up a new Intelligence Group. The Columbus complex, you know.

"At any rate we put into DK-8, and that's where I got that thing you're holding. On DK-8 it's a hunting implement."

Maddick looked puzzled. "Hunting," he said. "You mean the way David got Goliath? Zingo?"

"No," Jaris said. "It's not a missile. It's a snare. The natives set them out and trap animals with them."

Still stroking it, Maddick looked at the gadget. "Oh come now," he said. "You mean they just set them out, wait for termites to invade, and then eat the termites? That kind of snare?"

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Jaris' voice stiffened for an instant. "There are queerer things than that in space." Then his voice softened. "You're young yet," he said. "You have time enough. That gadget, for instance: you wouldn't believe a culture was founded on it. You're not ready to believe."

Maddick's smile said: "Well, after all you can't expect me to swallow this stuff, can you?" Aloud he said, "A yarn's a yarn. Let's have it."

"Yes," Jaris said, "I suppose it is incredible. In a way, that's what space is: the constant recurrence of the incredible. After a while you forget what a norm is. Then you're a space hand." He looked off a moment across the shining collection around him. "DK-8, for example. Once the indicator told us to expect intelligence, it was no surprise to come on side-humans. By that time it had been universally established that you can expect intelligence only in primate and quasi-primate forms. Unless you've got the prehensile hand and the supraorbital arch there's just no way for intelligence to get started. A monkey develops a hook for swinging through the trees and an eye for measuring distances between leaps and he's fitted for his environment. But it just happens that the hand is good for picking things up and the eye is good for looking at them closely, and pretty soon the monkey is picking things up and examining them and beginning to get ideas. And pretty soon he's beginning to use tools. An ungulate couldn't use a tool in a billion years; he has nothing to hold it with. There's no reason why there mightn't be some sort of lizard intelligence I suppose, except that it just doesn't seem to happen. Probably too low-grade a nervous system."

Jaris suddenly caught himself, realizing that his voice had been running away with the enthusiasm of his argument. "I really haven't been back very long," he said with a smile. "That's the sort of argument that gets hot in space." His voice softened again. "I was saying we weren't much surprised to come on side-humans once we'd got an intelligence indication. . . ."

"Odd that I've never heard of it," Maddick said. "I keep pretty well posted on that sort of thing. And surely a really close siding —"

"The fact is," Jaris said, interrupting in his turn, "we didn't make a report."

Maddick's voice sharpened with surprise. "Good heavens, man, and you're telling me? What on earth's to keep me from turning you over to Federation Space Base and getting your mind picked for it?" Once again his eyes swept the treasure room as if running an inventory and his lips pursed shrewdly for an instant. Then his voice loosened. "If I believed you, that is."

Jaris leaned back in his chair as if buried in thought and for a moment his voice seemed to be coming up from a cave shaft. "It doesn't really matter," he said. "And besides," he added with a smile, his voice growing near again, "you don't, as you say, believe me."

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Maddick looked down at his hand still stroking the polished sides of the gadget. The thumb snaked out over the little polished dimple. In, up and back, in, up and back. Without raising his head, he raised his eyes to meet Jaris's. "Should I?" he said. Once more his eyes flicked over the treasure room, resting longest on the cabinet of space-crystals.

Jaris noted his look and smiled. "I've often thought myself what a lovely target I'd make for a blackmailer."

Maddick looked away quickly. "If the blackmailer could believe you."

Jaris smiled. "Always that doubt," he said. "What would you say if I told you the siding was so close that Terrans can mate with DK's?"

Maddick paused a long minute before answering, his eyes fixed on the thing in his hand, watching his fingers curl about and stroke it. He shook his head as if putting something out of his mind. "I seem to be beyond surprises at this point. Strangely, I believe you. And strangely, I know I should be arguing that it's impossible."

Suddenly his voice flared up, "Look here," he said, "what is all this rigmarole?" Again his voice calmed abruptly. "All right. Yes, sure. I believe you. I'm crazy, God knows, but I believe you."

"Enough to turn me in?"

Maddick flushed without answering.

"I'm afraid they'd only tell you it's impossible," Jaris said. "Pity too," he added wearily. "As I was saying I'd be such lush pickings for a blackmailer." He paused a moment, then added gently, "Don't worry about it, son."

Maddick's voice did not rise to anger. He looked down at his hand still stroking the thing. "Is that a threat?" he said indifferently.

Jaris shook his head. "A regret," he said. He blew out a cloud of smoke and spoke again more brightly. "Besides, all the arguments against its being possible are too sound. Life forms can mate across some of the branches of divergent evolution if the species are related by some reasonably proximate common ancestor. The lion and the tiger, for instance, or the horse and the jackass. But it doesn't work for convergent evolution. You can evolve a species somewhere in space that resembles man, and with space enough and time enough you can evolve a lot of them, but the chemistry and physiology of egg and sperm are too tricky to come close enough without a common ancestor. Nevertheless Terrans can mate with DK women, and have mated with them. That may sound incredible, said in this room, but after a while you find nothing is incredible in deep space."

"Deep space," Maddick said softly. His voice sounded as if it were stroking the words with the same sensuous pleasure his fingers found in stroking the polished thing in his hand.

Jaris caught the movement of his voice and nodded. "You've time yet.

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You'll get there. But to get back to DK-8. The only real difference between DKs and humans is the hair and the skin structure. DK-8 has a dense and tropical atmosphere. It's rather high in Co_2 and perpetually misty. The sun's rays have a hard time getting through the atmosphere. Also the planet is all-tropical. Consequently the animal life from which the DKs evolved never had to develop a fur covering. Hair is unknown on the planet. Instead, the DK life-forms developed a skin structure extremely sensitive to whatever diffused sun rays they can get. The skin is soft and pallid as a slug's. If a DK were exposed to the direct rays of Sol for a few minutes, he'd die of sunburn."

Jaris held up the cheroot before him and blew a puff of smoke over its lit end. "Nature," he said, "always has a trick of trying to deal two cards at once. The prehensile hand developed for one reason and became useful for something else. Just so, the DK's tremendously sensitive skin developed originally to absorb the most possible sun, but became in time the basis for a tremendously developed tactile sense.

"That goes for the lower animals too. Their tropisms are fantastically dominant over their other responses. Once an animal starts stroking one of those gadgets as you're doing, it simply cannot stop."

Maddick smiled and looked at his hand without answering. The polished sides of the thing gleamed dully, and his thumb ran down into and over the little hollow. Down into and over. Down into and over.

"You might almost say," Jaris continued, "that the DKs have developed a tactile science to a degree unknown to us. The energy we have put into a tool culture, they have put into a tactile culture. It isn't a highly developed society in our terms: a rigid tribal matriarchy with a few basic tools that only the women are permitted to operate, and at that only a special clan of the women. The other women lounge about on delicately arranged hill terraces and just lie motionless soaking up sun energy or working up a little voodoo mostly based on hypnotism and tactile gratification."

His voice grew softer and slightly distant. "As you might expect, they grow incredibly obese. At first it seemed repulsive to see them lying so. But on DK-8 obesity is really a survival characteristic. It makes for more surface to absorb sun energy. And the women have such perfect control of their skin surfaces that their bodies remain strangely well-proportioned."

He leaned back and almost closed his eyes. "Amazing control," he half whispered. Then suddenly he chuckled. "But you're probably wondering how they work such hard wood so perfectly with practically no tools. If you look closely you'll find that what you're holding is really grainless. Actually it isn't wood at all, but a kind of huge seed, something like an avocado nut. As you know, you can carve a fresh avocado nut almost as easily as you mold

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clay, but when you let it dry, it becomes extremely hard. Extremely hard."

"Extremely hard," Maddick agreed distantly.

"The women of the proper clan work these things, and the men set them out in the forests. As you might suppose, the men are a rather scrawny lot, and would starve soon enough if they had to depend on their own muscular prowess as hunters. These gadgets take care of all that, however. The animals, with their extremely high tactile suggestibility, come through the forest and find one of these things in their way. They begin to stroke it and feel it, and they just can't stop. The men don't even kill them; all slaughtering is handled by the ruling clan of women. The men simply wait till the animal has worked itself into the right state, and then lead it back to the slaughtering compound — still under hypnosis of course."

"Of course," Maddick agreed, his fingers working softly and rhythmically.

Jaris leaned back. His politeness was unfaltering, but now there was a touch of triumph in his voice. "There's really only one other thing you need to know. The men used to have unmanageable spells. As a result, it has become traditional to hypnotize them practically at birth. The practice is untold centuries old.

"Unfortunately, however, nature still deals a tricky hand. Keep the species in abeyance long enough and it stops thrusting toward its own development. The generations of hypnosis have had the effect of breeding the life-wish out of the males. It's as if the genes and the sperm were just slowly quitting. When we landed on DK-8 there were hardly enough men left to work the traps."

He leaned forward, smiling. "You can imagine what a treasure our crew must have seemed to the tribal leaders, once it was discovered that we could interbreed: new vigorous males, a new start, fresh blood for the life stream."

He paused and his tone became steady and dry. "I think perhaps you will understand now why I came back alone. The only male ever to leave DK-8. Although," he added, "in one sense I've never really left it."

". . . never . . . really . . . left . . . it . . .," Maddick said.

Jaris nodded and came around the desk. Leaning over Maddick, he blew a puff of smoke directly into his open eyes. Maddick did not stir. His eyes remained fixed straight ahead and he remained fixed motionless in the chair. Only the fingers of his right hand continued to move, curling about the polished thing, while his thumb flicked out and over the little hollow.

Jaris straightened, still smiling sadly, picked up a curiously wrought little bell from the desk and tinkled it once.

Across the room, a door swung open on a darkened alcove in which something huge and pale showed dimly.

"He is ready, darling," Jaris said.

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At long last a chronicle of Gavagan's Bar offers the pleasing spectacle of Mr. Cohan forsaking his usual role of moderator and Mr. Gross escaping the frustration that has been his unhappy lot. Here, these gentlemen come into their own and join forces to solve what might be called — if this were just another detective story and not a tale of truth — "the case of the missing bourbon."

The Untimely Toper

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP
and FLETCHER PRATT

As THE DOOR of the men's room opened, swinging back with a bang, Mr. Cohan started violently, looked over his shoulder and almost missed Mr. Witherwax' glass with the Martini he was pouring. His expression might almost have been one of relief when he saw that it was little Doc Brenner, who strode importantly to the bar and demanded a Collins.

"What's the matter, Mr. Cohan?" asked Witherwax. "Afraid the hinges were coming off? You ought to be ashamed of yourself for frightening an old friend that way, Doc."

Mr. Cohan, pouring, said: "It's not what's coming off but what's going on that has me counting me fingers, and that's a fact. Me to be short a whole bottle of bourbon in my inventory. Gavagan will never let me hear the end of it."

Mr. Gillison said, "Mr. Cohan, you astound me, you even pain me deeply. You who have carried the troubles of so many others, to have difficulties of your own! Give me another scotch and soda."

"It's not my trouble," said Mr. Cohan, "though it does be making trouble for me. It's that Mr. Pearce. I never know when he is at all since it happened."

There was a little chorus of "Huh?" "Since what happened?" out of which rose Witherwax' voice: "I read a book once about a man that didn't know what time he was in and got all mixed up with a lot of Communists in England when he came out of a tin can."

"Yes," said young Mr. Keating from the library. "That would be Victor Rousseau's *Messiah of the Cylinder*."

"Could you put a man in a can and bring him out later?" said Witherwax.

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"No," said Doc Brenner, eating the cherry from his Collins.

"Hold on a minute," said Mr. Cohan. "You're misunderstanding me. I —"

"Why not?" asked Gillison, ignoring Mr. Cohan. "Don't they freeze frogs and —"

"Like the time my cousin Ludwig got locked in the freezer at Greenspan and Walker's," said Mr. Gross, "and ate up all that suet because —"

Doc Brenner said, "Mr. Cohan, I want to hear about this Mr. Pearce. And if you'll lend me your bung-starter, I'll see that you're not interrupted before the end of it. What do you mean by that curious statement 'you don't know *when* he is'?"

"Mr. Pearce," said Mr. Cohan, "is that young felly that comes in here mostly on Thursdays, the one with the little moustache and the big ears. And what I should have said is that I wish I knew *where* he is and *when's* he coming back from wherever that may be because he —"

Gillison emitted a sound. "I remember. If he had ten times as much brains as he has and cheated on the entrance examination, he might be able to get into a home for the feeble-minded."

I would not be saying that (said Mr. Cohan). It's bad for the trade to run down your customers and Gavagan wouldn't like it. But as long as you have put your tongue to it, I won't be denying what you say, neither, and what's more I will tell you that he's always driving around in one of these hot rods with some girl beside him, and she not the kind you'd want to be meeting your mother. My brother Julius, that's on the force, says he'll be cutting somebody's throat one of these days just to prove he can do it, and that's a hard thing to say of a man, but it was the man that made it to be said.

Most of the time he's in that Italian place around the corner, where they have a juke box and will let him get as drunk as he pleases, but every now and then he has an unholy row with his friends or they have one with him, and he comes to Gavagan's. Always talking about his troubles he is, as though honest liquor wasn't enough to get for his money, not that I mind helping a young felly along when he needs some advice, but I'm not the man to be spending my time telling anyone how to make the waitress at Rosenthal's.

Well, this night when it started, Mr. Pearce was in here getting the beginnings of a load on, and so was this Dr. Abaris. D'ye know him? — Theophrastus V. Abaris, that calls himself a magician though he ain't never been on the stage, and a doctor, though when Mrs. Moon had a seizure in here one night he could do nothing about it whatever.

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(Witherwax interjected, "Say, whatever happened to that guy Murdoch, that this Abaris was going to put a curse on or something because he lost the dragon?"

(Brenner and Gross shrugged, and the former said, "I don't know. He just stopped coming in, I guess.")

That's right (continued Mr. Cohan), he just stopped. That's the way it is running a bar; somethimes they stop coming and you never know why till you read in the paper that they've taken a ride in a hearse or married a woman with a million dollars. It's a sad business, it is, and I'm looking forward to the day when Gavagan will let me retire. You're always losing your best friends.

Not that I would call this Dr. Abaris one of my best friends, with his hair hanging down to his collar and his pasty face, but he's always the gentleman and always stands there quietly drinking that wine that Gavagan imports for him special. Mr. Pearce was drinking — let's see now, it was Lonacoming whisky, and talking about some change he was going to make in his hot rod, when all of a sudden there's a bat flying back and forth at the top of the room. Dr. Tobolka, when I asked him about it, said it had probably been asleep up there at the top of the pillars and just woke up, though how it got in in the first place I don't know.

Now, me, I don't care about bats one way or another, but this Pearce, he got all excited and ran back there and grabbed the broom and begun chasing this way and that through the bar, trying to hit it. He was climbing up on chairs and even on one of the tables, yelling like a wild man, and I was just thinking I better cut down on his Lonacoming when Dr. Abaris says to him, "Take your time, young man, take your time!" Not real loud, but you couldn't miss hearing him.

He might as well have been talking to a deaf man, for this Pearce made one swipe with the broom and then another, and whop! the dead corpse of the creature dropped down on the bar right in front of Dr. Abaris.

Mr. Pearce put the broom away and you would have said he thought he was a hero. But Dr. Abaris he picked up the dead bat with a sorrowful expression on the round fat face of him, and took out a handkerchief and wrapped the bat in it and put it in his pocket. Then he turned to Mr. Pearce with a look on his face that I'd not be wanting to take to bed with me at night, and he says:

"Now, young man, you *shall* take your time."

"Huh?" says Mr. Pearce. "You didn't want that thing flying around here, did you? They're dirty."

Never a word says Dr. Abaris. He just gets down off his stool and pays for his drink and walks out, and I'm thinking it will be a cold day in July

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before we see him again. I said to Mr. Pearce, "Look here, young felly," I said, "maybe they'll let you throw things around and break up the place in that Italian joint around the corner, but we will not stand for it in Gavagan's."

With that he gets red in the face and says may he drop dead if he's ever found in this crummy dump again — that's the way he talks — and drinks off the rest of his Lonacoming and starts for the door, then changes his mind and goes toward the men's room instead. We might have had a couple more words on the subject, but just then in came Mr. Jeffers with a couple of his friends and I had to wait on them and gave no more attention than to think that if young Pearce never did come back it would be good riddance of bad rubbish, even though it was one less customer for Gavagan's. I didn't see him come out of the men's room and when I went there later myself, he wasn't inside, so I thought he must have slipped past the bar while I was bending over for cracked ice or something.

The very next night, that would be a Friday, I was waiting on the trade as usual, about 9 o'clock and not many people in here, when the door of the men's room opens and out comes this Pearce with a kind of funny look on the face of him. I could of swore I hadn't seen him come into the bar, and especially after what happened the night before, I thought he had his nerve with him.

He comes right up to the bar and says, "I want a double Lonacoming."

Now I'm a man that is willing to let bygones be bygones or I wouldn't be behind the bar at Gavagan's, so I poured it for him and said nothing. He takes a drink of it and says, "What kind of trick are you trying to put over?"

His voice was that nasty I started reaching for the bung-starter, but all I said was, "That's as good whisky as you'll find in this town."

"Oh, that," he says. "I don't mean that," and points to the calendar there on the wall, where I mark off each day as it comes up to keep things straight. "Today's the twenty-seventh."

"It is not," says I, and I got the evening paper to show him it was the twenty-eighth.

He acted like somebody had pushed him in the face. "Something's cockeyed," he said, and went over to make a telephone call.

After a couple of minutes he was back. "I've lost a whole day out of my life," he said, "and my girl has given me the air because I stood her up." With that he orders another double Lonacoming and starts in on it.

I'd heard enough of his girl stories not to want to hear another, so I went down the bar to wait on some of the trade, just keeping the corner of my eye on him. I'll say this much: something seemed to have knocked all the

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fight out of him, he was as quiet and decent as you'd expect a man to be in Gavagan's and for all the effect the whisky had on him, it might have been soda pop. After a while he went to the men's room again.

The place was filling up by this time and I didn't have a chance to folly him right away, but as soon as I got everyone taken care of, I went in there. And it was empty; there was neither hide nor hair of Pearce anywhere in Gavagan's. And he didn't slip out the door, neither, I was watching it.

The next time he showed up was two days later, on the thirtieth, in the afternoon. The day man told me about it when I came on that night. I hadn't said nothing to him about the way this Pearce disappeared because Gavagan likes to keep a very orderly place and doesn't want things like this to be happening, so it was him told me about it, warning me about a felly that had four, five drinks of Lonacoming whisky and slipped out without paying for them. He descripted this felly and it sounded like Pearce.

"Did you see him come out of the men's room?" I asked.

"I did that," says he, "and with his eye all the time on the clock and the calendar while he was drinking. And the last I saw of him, he went back in again."

"And did he look like a man well gone in drink?" says I.

"If he had, I would not have served him in Gavagan's. He walked like a judge and stood like a traffic cop."

"Then he'll be back," says I.

"He had better be," said the day man. "Nobody is going to get away with owing Gavagan $3.15, plus tax."

Well, we fixed it up that whichever one of us was on the next time this Pearce came round would get the $3.15 from him and tell him that since he'd said he didn't like this place, he could take his feet out of it and never come back. But he fooled us. He did indeed.

The very next morning when the day man opened the place, there was an empty fifth of bourbon on the bar, lying on its side and a glass beside it and the bar all spotted and stained in a way I would never leave it. There was only one thing it could mean, and that is that this Pearce came back after the place was closed and helped himself. The worst of it is that now he was changing drinks, from Lonacoming to bourbon. A man that switches like that has no control of himself. And I'm short a bottle of bourbon on my inventory, a thing that's never happened before.

There was a little silence. Then Gillison said, "I'm afraid I don't quite see. . . ."

"Why, it's as clear as a bottle of good gin!" exclaimed Mr. Gross. "You see, this Pearce —"

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"It's the business of the men's room, isn't it?" Doc Brenner asked shrewdly.

"It is that," Mr. Cohan nodded. "I have never seen the felly come in or go out through the front door of Gavagan's. It's always to the men's room he's going, or coming from there —"

"That's just it!" cried Mr. Gross. "There's no other —"

"Like you said," Mr. Witherwax broke in, "you must have been bending down behind the bar —"

"Listen to me!" Mr. Gross screamed. A sudden silence fell. Mr. Cohan stared hard at Mr. Gross and said, "Now, Mr. Gross, Gavagan's is a quiet —"

"Listen to me," Mr. Gross repeated in a calmer tone. "It's as plain as the nose on your face. On my face, rather." They grinned. "You were right the first time, Mr. Cohan. When you said '*when* he was.' Because that's just what it is. When Pearce killed that bat Dr. Abaris put a hex on him or something so that, instead of losing his legs when he starts to walk across the room — like a guy does when he's had too much — this guy Pearce loses his feet in *time*."

"By golly," whispered Gillison.

"Shut up," said Doc Brenner. "Go on, Mr. Gross."

Mr. Gross beamed. "Now, the first time I don't guess Pearce was very tight. So he only lost a single day, like he said. But then he got a lot drunker — on double Lonacomings, remember — and it was two days gone. Next three days and now, on this whole fifth of bourbon, it's four days he's missed. He'd oughta be back pretty soon now, Mr. Cohan, although I don't know just how much liquor causes him to lose how much time, if you see what I mean."

"By golly," said Mr. Gillison again.

"I do indeed see what you mean, Mr. Gross. And as you have so kindly solved my problem you will have your usual boilermaker on the house."

The rest of them stared with awe, first at Mr. Gross, then at Mr. Cohan as the latter reached down under the bar, then came up with a dusty bottle of what was obviously very old bourbon. From this bottle he meticulously filled a double shot-glass to its brim and carefully, not spilling a drop, he placed it before Mr. Gross. After returning the ancient bourbon to its lair, he drew a glass of beer (without collar) and placed that alongside the shot-glass.

Finally, Doc Brenner cleared his throat. "I — ah — don't wish to stain Mr. Gross's triumph," he said, "but as I see it, Mr. Cohan, your problem is only half-solved. How are you going to untangle Pearce's feet?"

"By God, that's right!" exclaimed Witherwax. "How are you going to get him back from where — *when*ever he is and keep him here — now?"

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"Otherwise he'll probably steal a whole case of liquor from you," said Gillison.

Mr. Gross sipped his venerable bourbon.

Mr. Cohan slapped the bar with a heavy palm. "I have it. Look now, the young felly is staggering every which way through time because he's drunk. Right?"

There was a chorus of nods.

"Well, then, we'll sober him up." Once again Mr. Cohan rummaged beneath the bar but this time he produce a bottle filled with a thick brownish liquid. "I'll be waiting here for that young felly day and night until he shows up and there's the tipple he'll be getting!"

"What in heaven's name is that?" asked Mr. Witherwax.

"A prairie oyster, with Worcestershire in it, and tomato juice, and some bitters to give his stomach a kick in the pants, and red pepper for the good of his soul."

The door of the men's room was flung back with a bang, and the habitués of Gavagan's turned as a unit to face what was indubitably the missing Pearce. Except for a certain disarrangement of the hair, he had not the appearance of a man deeply under the influence of liquor, but the lines at the base of his moustache were twitching and his eyes seemed to be popping out of his head as he stared at the calendar.

"I need — a drink," he said, clutching the bar with one hand, and with his eyes still on the calendar, fumbled for the dose Mr. Cohan poured. A long swig of it went down before he restrained himself, gasping, and dropped the glass on the bar.

"My God!" he said. "What was that? Are you trying to poison me?"

"I am not," said Mr. Cohan, firmly, but was spared any addition to this statement by the appearance Pearce gave of being in the throes of a revolution as violent as any that ever afflicted a Latin American republic. His mouth came open and little sounds emerged from it, he clutched the bar-edge with watering eyes, and then, emitting a series of gigantic burps, he released his grip and dived for the security of the men's room.

Gillison gazed at the closed door behind him and addressed Mr. Cohan. "Your treatment was certainly drastic," he said. "But I don't quite understand."

"You do not?" said Mr. Cohan placidly. "Then go look in that men's room. You'll be finding it empty. The man is stone sober by now, his feet are on the right time track, he's back where and when he belongs, and thank the Lord this is one place he'll not be coming to again. It's not that I like to be discouraging the trade, but there are a few things we cannot have in Gavagan's."

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We are frankly wearied to the point of nausea by speculative articles on extraterrestrial life which begin, "Life as we know it can exist only . . ." The data that follow are always solid — and quite unrelated to the problem of the possibility of life elsewhere. To judge life by the standards prevalent on that mote in the cosmic eye known as Sol III is on a level with pre-Copernican views of the geocentric structure of the universe. But thinking in anthropomorphic terms (always, of course, considering oneself as the only conceivable type of anthropos) *will probably characterize most forms of reasoning life on all worlds; and realizing this, Mr. Dryfoos indulges in some ingenious speculation on how we may seem to life of a very different order.*

Man

by DAVE DRYFOOS

We used to think ours was the only world, till the man taught us by the shortness of his visit that there must be others. But of course ours is the best world.

Where else could there exist beings like ourselves, knowing only pure thought and simple joy? We need merely spread our leaves to be bathed in warmth and light. We embrace the air, and dance with zephyrs; hug the earth, and drink its nectar. Our only enemy is fire, a rare and accidental occurrence. The Things scampering among our branches and clinging to our trunks are seldom disturbing, and if they become destructive, we have the means to dispose of them.

Surely no one lives so pleasantly as we do, blooming with the juices of Spring, strengthening in the heat of Summer, transmitting the impulse to life in Fall, and baring our heads every Winter in respect for the Sun that fills our lives with familiar rhythm.

Familiar rhythm. Yes. Nothing ever was strange here till the man came.

He, however, spoke of unfamiliar matters: of Systems and Galaxies; of his home, which he termed a planet like our world; of himself and his life-schedule, which was not rhythmic, but ugly; and of fear, which he mentioned continually — in denial. These concepts were strange to us.

We were equally strange to the man. He called us trees, though ad-

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mittedly we differed from any trees he had previously experienced. He knew we respond to radiant energy, but did not grasp the extent of our sensitivity. He was totally unaware of the wave lengths affecting us, and could not comprehend our ability to converse by modulating the frequencies we reflect and amplifying them with the electricity of our life-processes.

Because he did not know we can speak, he did not realize we are men, since speech is the distinguishing characteristic of men, the trait by which *we* recognized *him*.

He was ignorant because his perceptions were so inferior to ours. For instance, certain vibrations in the air seemed unpleasantly meaningful to him in ways he mentioned as sound and odor. And reflected light was not to him the carrier of thought, but the cause of useless reactions called shapes and colors.

He lived imprisoned in a world all his own even when among us. It would be absurd to suppose his foreign origin prejudiced us, but inadequate physical and mental endowment doomed him to inferiority — or would have, had he stayed here.

Because this man was an inferior, there were those among us who wished to dispose of him as soon as his emanations became perceptible. Most of us, however, wanted to talk to him first. We who were curious had our way, but not without an attack of disagreement — a disease with which the foreigner seemed to have infected us upon his arrival, and to which he was himself peculiarly susceptible.

But this we did not learn till we had deciphered his language.

Decoding was difficult, and required the collaboration of us all — the pooled perceptions and ratiocinations of our thousandfold individual intellects, each with instantaneous access to the rest. The task was possible only because the man had of course to discuss matters familiar to us — the world, new to him, in which we live. Certain carefully planned operations, such as the simultaneous disposal of all the Things nesting in our branches, helped us by stimulating him to consider subjects known to us in advance.

Thus we learned his names for the Things, which he called animal life-forms, and understood danger, his primary concern. His thought-processes we found more limited than our own, but, as is true of the Things, he was extremely mobile.

Since the Things do not speak at all, he was not quite the lowest being we had experienced, but he spoke only when separated into parts at a distance from one another, not when behaving as a unit. His several parts could rejoin his main body or split off at will, thereby demonstrating that he was an extremely primitive sort of man, since we have long since lost this power of subdivision.

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Additional evidence of inferiority lay in the disagreements to which he was subject and with which, as I said, he infected us. We had no way of knowing whether his main body was in a state of conflict within itself, but the subdivisions often argued with that main body when at a distance from it.

The principal area of contention concerned his ignorance of our world. A subdivision would say something like: "Numerous and varied life-forms available here. Request permission to initiate biological collections."

And the reply would be: "Biologists have repeatedly been directed to confine activities to photography, sound-recording, and similar non-destructive research. No specimens may be collected."

Without quite understanding all that was intended, we were well able to comprehend the finality of this reply. It should have settled the matter, but one of our number nevertheless suffered a disfiguring attack on his trunk. Only after destruction had been prevented by our usual means did we learn our attacker was the man, or part of him.

The news came in the form of a message from a subdivision to the main body. "Anderson killed, apparently by falling limb," the subdivision said. "Returning."

This was an exceedingly ignorant remark, since the attack had been prevented, as always, by an electrical discharge. But perhaps ignorance was to have been expected, in view of the apparently limitless divisibility of this man. Not only had he broken apart his main body, but also the segment we had destroyed seemed a mere portion of the subdivision. And even that was not the end.

"Detail driver and jeep only," the main body told the Anderson segment. "Repetition accident considered unlikely. Do not return."

There was more, but we changed frequency to consider our own position. One attack on us had already been made. Other attacks were possible, particularly since the man failed to understand how and why we had disposed of the Anderson-fragment. Further, it was obvious that nothing of value could be learned from so inferior a being.

A little discussion preceded these conclusions, but this was symptomatic of our man-borne infection which itself proved the conclusions to be correct. We sent out our usual emanations unanimously.

The result was somewhat unexpected. In the first place, contrary to what experience with Things had led us to expect, all widely separated parts of the man caught fire, though we were merely trying to electrocute him. Then, just at the wrong time, a wind rose and spread the flames among us.

The effect was disastrous. Most of us were completely consumed. I was lucky to survive even in my present crippled condition.

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And the man was not destroyed. His voice seemed enfeebled, but was detectable even when the holocaust was at its height. We paid little attention then, of course, but our survivors tuned in on his frequency in time to hear some reports.

"Primary radio transmitter and receiver destroyed by fire originating from unexplained electrical disturbance of atmospheric origin," the Anderson portion reported to the main body. "Fire not, repeat not, started by negligence here. Many crippled life-forms, already dying, now available for collection. Request revocation of prohibition against taking biological specimens."

"Return to base," was the answer. "Destruction of equipment necessitates immediate departure. Make no, repeat no, collections. Life-forms here not yet well enough known to justify risks of handling, killing, or dissection. Disappointment of biologists regretted, but we cannot safely destroy what we do not understand."

Like everything else about the man, this explanation seemed strange. One would almost suspect he sensed his inferiority to us.

But that is quite impossible. Self-satisfaction is as characteristic of man as is language itself.

Note:

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With his usual precise, economical prose, Mr. Porges describes how even the last man on earth may be faced with the struggle for survival in a competitive world.

Mop-Up

by ARTHUR PORGES

WHEN HE HAD quartered the stricken land in vain for almost two years without finding another living person, the man came upon a witch, a vampire, and a ghoul holding solemn parley by a gutted church.

As he broke through the tangled, untrimmed hedges into the weed-grown garden, the witch laughed shrilly; and as if mocking her own white hairs, danced widdershins, cackling in delight, "There's one left, just as I thought, and a very pretty fellow, too!" She was a revolting old beldame, and he stared at her aghast.

The vampire, lean and elegant in a rusty black cloak, arose with his ruby eyes kindling. He crouched a little, and a pointed tongue flickered between full, soft lips. Catlike, he glided forward.

"Stop!" the witch cried. "He's the last, fool! Would you drink him dry? You must learn to use the blood of beasts. Remember, Baron — there's probably not another human in the whole world."

The vampire showed his enormous canines in a sly smile.

"You underestimate me, Mother. All I had in mind was a mere sip. It's been two years, and there's nothing quite like the fresh stuff, so strong and warm."

"No!" she protested. "He's mine. Not a drop. The poor darling's worn enough. There are plenty of animals left to suck on."

"Not for me — yet," was the lofty retort. "I prefer the blood banks. They'll keep me supplied for many years. People collected millions of pints, all nicely preserved, carefully stored, rich and tasty — then never got to use them. What a pity! Still," he added, his voice wistful, "cold blood is hardly the drink for a nobleman of my lineage."

"Blood banks!" she chortled, displaying strong, discolored teeth. "So that's where you've been getting it all this time. I wondered." She nodded cynical approval. "Then there's no problem, because *his* kind" — with a

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contemptuous gesture towards the ghoul, huddled beastlike behind them — "are set for ages, too. Nothing to do but pick and choose." Her stringy jaw muscles knotted. "So the man is mine!"

The ghoul gave him a single wicked glance, and continued digging at his clogged incisors with fingernails like splinters of glass. The man's stomach heaved; he gulped down a sour taste.

"Don't be afraid, darling boy," the hag crooned. "You're safe with us. And it's worth a deal to be snug these days, I can tell you."

He stood there, haggard and feverish, thinking himself mad. Among the survivors, if any, he had expected the usual proportion of carrion crows, but nothing like this fantastic trio. Still, perhaps even their company was better than the wrenching ache of complete isolation in a ravaged world. Two of them, at least, were outwardly human.

"You're not crazy," the witch reassured him, pinching his stubbled cheek. "You'll live long and well to serve me." She eyed him with a kind of leering coyness, utterly grotesque in an ugly old woman. "A fine, strong fellow. What a sweet lover he'll be for poor Mother Digby. I'll teach you the 435 ways —"

"Am I the last?" he muttered. "Really the last? I've searched. I —"

"Yes," the vampire said, with a melancholy smile. "Unfortunately, I fear you are." The ghoul tittered, and his eyes filmed over like oily, stagnant pools.

"Don't frighten him," she flared. "Sit down, my honey. Here, by me." She pulled him to her side, and dazed, he submitted.

"Tell me the truth," he begged again. "Am I actually the only one left?"

"Yes. First came the hydrogen bombs. It was something to see. I've been around a long time, my lad: the big Mississippi Quakes of 1815, Krakatoa, Hiroshima — they were nothing by comparison. The Baron knew it was coming — how did you know, hey? He won't tell." She snapped her fingers and laughed jeeringly; her bony elbow prodded the man. "Ah, it was the blood banks! I might have guessed — right?"

The Baron nodded coolly. "Yes. When they began to pyramid the stock piles, I suspected what would happen soon. That's when I told you to look out for fire. One atomic blast would have burnt your juiceless carcass to cinders." His lips twitched at her outraged expression. "As a nobleman, I was almost tempted to warn the more ancient monarchies of Europe. For the upstart Americans, with their absurd 'democracy,' I care nothing. Rule by comic book! But in the Balkans —" He broke off with a sigh.

"Germs, Mother," the ghoul croaked suddenly, giving her a doglike glance of worship.

"Right, my pet. The germs came next. Every country had secret cultures,

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deadly soups of plagues old and new. How the people died! All but my lovely man here." She patted his thigh. "Why are you still alive, hey?"

He shook his head. "There was a new, untested serum in our lab — a last attempt. Just a tiny drop. I had nothing to lose." He brooded a moment in silence, then asked, "How about Europe — Asia?"

"Wiped out. Nobody left. Not one saucy little Mamselle, or golden Eurasian, or cool English girl for you. Take old Mother Digby, and be satisfied. Don't let my wrinkled face fool you! Wine long in the cask is best!"

He shuddered away from her. "How can you be sure? About Europe?"

"There are ways. Before we lost contact with our fellows, I received regular reports; and since then I've made many flights of my own. Paris, London, Belgrade, Copenhagen — it's all the same. Some by bombs; more by disease."

"Where are Ours — the Others?" the ghoul demanded in a thick voice.

"Who knows?" she snapped, her lips tightening. "At the last Sabbath, few came. Maybe the old customs are dying as the silly humans died. Anyway, I've seen none for weeks now. Neither has the Baron." She turned back to the pale, bemused man. "Did you find any of your kind?"

"No," he admitted dully. "Only animals, and always huddled in groups. As if *they* were appalled, too. But — you're certain about the other countries?"

She flourished a veiny hand. "Clean sweep. From Tibet to Los Angeles. We cover oceans in hours, the Baron and I. *He*," sneering at the ghoul, "can only snuff about the ground." The ghoul winced. "You're the last human, all right. I knew one was about somewhere. I can tell. But no more rosy throats for the Baron, even if" — with a malicious smile — "he didn't prefer the easier method with blood banks!"

"Not much choice," was the unashamed reply. "And besides, people were getting harder to manage in these days of — ah — enlightenment. Even *he* was faced with a new problem: cremation."

A bubbling snarl came from the crouched ghoul.

"Never mind," the witch soothed him. "Your troubles have been over, these two years. No more cremation again, ever."

"We've just had cremation wholesale," the vampire pointed out. "And speaking of troubles," he jibed, "yours are not over, dear Mother. No orgies, no backsliding church folk to torment, and who's to care now if you dry up a cow?"

She ignored him, snuggling closer to the man. "Adam and Eve," she simpered, resting her white head on his shoulder.

"Don't!" He shrank away.

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She glared at him. "Will you, will you," she hissed. "Don't cross me, my puling innocent, or —!"

"He's good for only a short time at best," the vampire reminded her, pleasantly solicitous. "After that —"

"You lie!" she screeched. "By my arts he'll live a thousand — ten thousand — years. He'll learn to love me. And if you dare to touch him —!"

The Baron shrugged. He winked at the man. "Ignore her threats to you. You're so valuable to the lecherous old hag that she wouldn't harm — what's that?" He rose to his full height, pointing.

Far out in the brush, a faint, bobbing light twinkled, then another.

"Fireflies," the witch said, indifferently. She stroked the man's hand, and tried to press her leathery cheek to his.

"No," said the ghoul. Doglike, he sniffed the air, his damp snout quivering.

A moment later, two rabbits hopped into the garden. One of them cautiously drew nearer. It stopped about ten feet away, and rose up on its hind paws, with ears up. Its button of a nose twitched. They watched the animal in amazement.

"They're certainly tame around here," the man muttered. He sensed a possible diversion, and alerted himself for escape. But he felt little hope. How could a lone mortal elude this dreadful trio?

The rabbit squeaked loudly, peremptorily, and a larger animal came up behind it, laboriously hauling in its jaws something that trailed on the ground.

"That's a beaver," said the man, unobtrusively edging away.

As the animal approached, they recognized its burden: a freshly felled sapling, one end gnawed to a rough point.

Suddenly the rabbit uttered a series of high, chirping sounds, strangely modulated. It waved one snowy paw in a gesture of command. The beaver responded with an irritable grunt, wrestling its clumsy stick forward. The dancing lights reappeared, very close now: tiny, flaming torches, gripped in the handlike paws of two raccoons, each running jerkily on three legs.

The rabbit made a new, imperious motion; it pointed directly at the squat, silent ghoul.

The witch broke into a laugh, and startled, the rabbit crouched, poised for flight. "Animals!" she jeered. "Attacking *us!*" She turned to the grave Baron. "You heard that rabbit — it's actually giving some sort of orders." She pointed a derisive finger at the rodent, small and wary, studying her with soft, luminous eyes. "Hey, there — do you think we're afraid of beavers and such vermin?"

"Wait." The vampire clutched her arm. "I doubt if they understand

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English. It's some simple language of their own. They've learned a lot in two years — if the whole thing didn't really begin much earlier. Mother, this is a serious matter. Don't you see? The stake's for me; the fire for you; and for *him*, I imagine —"

The ghoul gave a hollow, moaning cry, and dived crashing into the nearest bushes. A moment after, there was a thin, bestial howl of pain. Then the underbush crackled, and the ghoul stumbled back into the garden. He lurched blindly towards the witch, and they saw that his face was gone, leaving something like a wet sponge, soft and amorphous. The man stared in frozen horror, oblivious of his opportunity. There was a deep-chested growl from the weeds, and a great, shaggy form shambled out. It was a grizzly bear, grim and implacable, with bloody foam on its champing jaws.

Gasping, the witch leaped aside. The mangled ghoul groped for her, whispering in fear. Silently the bear padded forward, its heavy coat rippling. But before it could close in, there was a quavering shriek like a woman in torment, a tawny blur, and a mountain lion, sickle claws wide spread, landed squarely upon the ghoul's back, smashing him to the ground.

Screaming hoarsely, the blinded monster writhed, clutching with thick, earth-stained fingers for his assailant. But the lion's hind legs were already gathered for the disembowelling stroke, and the ghoul had no chance. It was soon over; the quasi-human body lay still. The panther sat back, licking its great paws like any kitchen tabby. It paused once to give the man a sidelong, inscrutable glance. His pulse leaped to a new realization. Was the lion promising deliverance?

"Mother," the vampire said composedly, "this is the finish. Now we know where the Others went." There was a tinge of weariness in his accented voice. "Well, a nobleman does not fear — death." He pronounced the last word almost wonderingly.

"Idiot!" snarled the witch. "We're not earthbound like that," thrusting a finger at the torn ghoul.

The Baron gave a fatalistic shrug, met her challenging gaze, and smiled. He pulled his cloak tight, dislimned, and began to shrink. When he seemed about to vanish completely, there was a smoky flash, and a huge bat winged up from the garden, a spectral silhouette against the sunset sky. The black cloak lay empty on the grass.

A sonorous belling rang in the distance, harsh, yet mournfully musical, the call of a moose. Even in the circumstances, the man thrilled to the heady sound, recalling past hunts. The rabbit squealed in excitement, pointing upward. And they came, almost in military formation: a vast flight of birds, all predators of the air. Eagles, falcons, and hundreds of smaller piratical hawks, swift and rakish. They swooped with raucous cries; the sky throbbed

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to their wingbeats. A mighty golden eagle led the attack, hurtling 2,000 feet straight down, to strike with open talons. They heard the wind whistling through its stiff feathers and the crisp impact as the half-mile swoop reached a cimax in that shattering blow.

The bat crumpled, disrupted in mid-air. It spun downward, erratic as a falling leaf, and there, in the weedy garden, the vampire reappeared, broken-backed.

As he squirmed, trying desperately to arise, the beaver drew near with its crudely-pointed sapling. Just out of reach, it paused, earnest and phlegmatic, its whiskered face indicating a solemn concern with the task ahead. The vampire glowered with concentrated malignance as a host of smaller animals pattered up. Sharp teeth and tenacious claws pinned the writhing thing, while four chipmunks held the stick upright in their facile paws, the point upon the heaving breast.

Then, from the darkening thicket, a bull moose emerged. He moved with stately tread, his split hooves clacking. On reaching the thrashing vampire, he snorted once, as if in profound distaste, and stood there waiting. The rabbit snapped its paw down in a vertical arc, and with a single blow of his massive forefoot, the moose drove the stake home.

Squawking imprecations, the witch abandoned her vain aerial search for an opening in the umbrella of birds, dropped heavily a dozen feet to the earth, and with ragged white locks streaming, crashed through the ranks of lesser animals. One of them grated in agony. But the witch halted abruptly, cowering. She looked about with darting, baleful eyes, a hunched figure of evil. They poured into the garden from all sides: bears, panthers, badgers, and two purebred bulls, wickedly horned and bellicose. Overhead, the hawks circled, watching with fierce yellow eyes. The man saw the beasts converge, backing her steadily toward the church wall, a fire-scarred, crazily tilted brick barrier. There were muffled sounds, and he heard clearly a wheezy sobbing. He smiled briefly, and some of the tension left him. The raccoons, like conspirators in their dark masks, raced in with torches, followed by dozens of beasts dragging twigs and bark. An old, gaunt cow ambled by with a fence rail in her worn jaws. She peeped at the man with liquidly compassionate eyes. Before long, the pyre flamed high against the blackened wall. There was a final wailing cry as the witch died.

He dropped to his knees, emotionally exhausted. They had freed him. The beasts of the forest and farm: the burly, comical black bears, the sullen, feral grizzlies, the pretty rabbits and squirrels, even an old cow, doubtless filled with affection for some mouldering barnyard where children had laughed and people had once been kind. All these had joined to deliver the last man.

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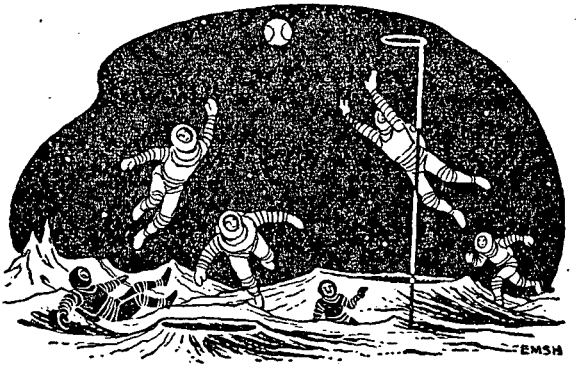
Touched, he peered through growing dusk at the rabbit, trying to convey his gratitude and delight. There would be a new Golden Age, wherein man and beast might live in loving harmony. He forced back guilty visions of timid deer horribly wounded, of dying birds cheerfully ravaged by his dog. But that was past. No more hunting for him. Instead, he would teach them man's wonders. He would —

The rabbit hopped aside, and four lean wolves pressed forward, licking black lips. A bull pawed the earth, bellowing. High above, an early owl hooted.

The rabbit faced the wolves, pointing to the man with one paw, the other poised in a familiar manner.

The man understood that pregnant signal, and the soft, purring sounds he had begun to make, died in his throat. It was thumbs down.



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Wherein a new writer straightforwardly argues that those traditional New England attributes of thrift, stern integrity and strict adherence to the strict letter of a bargain are not restricted to this planet, or even to this system.

Yankee Exodus

by RUTH M. GOLDSMITH

JOSHUA PERKINS KNOCKED out his pipe against the side of the porch steps and squinted at the noon sun. "Shouldn't wonder but what it's time you was heading back," he said, getting up and stretching his tall, spare frame. Joshua's companion — Adam, as he called him — rose, too, but forgot to readjust his gravity control and with his first step sailed into the air and banged against the porch roof.

"Better hold her, or she'll head for the barn," Joshua said, watching Adam climb down one of the porch posts.

"Plumb forgot," Adam acknowledged. Together they started down the hill in back of the house. "Wouldn't change your mind?" Adam asked. "Could take you up, say, 500 miles. Sight to see. Wouldn't take long."

Joshua shook his head. "Ain't one to go somewheres just to be going. Chores to do."

Adam nodded. "A rolling stone gathers no moss," he said, and shot into the air again — this time with purpose. When he climbed down from the top of the tree he had a squirrel in one hand, a branch of oak in another, and a bunch of acorns in another.

"Got your hands full," Joshua said, with remarkable restraint, considering it was his natural inclination to point out that his property rights were being violated. He made the best of the situation by trading the items for information. "Don't recollect, offhand," he said, "whether you see things like that where you come from."

"Not the likes of these," Adam admitted.

They had reached the flat field where Adam's silvery space ship rested, its round rim hugging the ground. Adam loaded his cargo and prepared for take-off, while Joshua busied himself by checking the structure of the stone wall that edged the field. There were still things he was curious to know

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about the ship, but he hadn't lived 62 years on a New England farm, and his fathers before him, without learning how to temper curiosity with caution. He was salting away more knowledge with each of Adam's visits, and patience was golden.

The disk kicked like a mule and shot up, almost out of sight. It dropped down just as fast, hung motionless some 50 feet above Joshua. Then its rim wobbled as an airplane dips its wings in salute. Adam appeared at a port and waved two hands. Joshua waved back.

The disk climbed again, slowly. It was over the house when a flashing thing dropped from it. The thing hit the ridge of the ell with a great splintering sound and smashed through the roof.

The disk hesitated, then continued to rise.

Joshua didn't hurry his stride. By the time he got to the house he had it clear in his mind that this had been an accident, that Adam had no cause to bear grudge against him, and therefore hadn't dropped the thing on purpose.

He examined the damaged ell carefully. Then he brought out the old sea chest, unlocked it, took out the insurance papers and examined them. What he was looking for was there, as clear as anything, even if it was in the fine print. He called his insurance agent, Tom Peabody, on the phone.

"Why hello there, Josh," Peabody's voice came heartily over the wire.

"My house has been damaged," Joshua said, "like it says here in the policy, by an object falling from an aircraft."

"Sorry to hear that," Peabody said sympathetically. "One moment while I get your file. Let's see — Fire, Lightning, and Extended Coverage . . . Much damage, Josh?"

"I figure it at $1296.34. Though it's likely to be more if there's any delay attending to it. A stitch in time saves nine."

"Well, you'll hear from our adjuster, and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to call."

"Ay-yah." Joshua hung up, put away the insurance policy, and reckoned his time. There were chores to do first, and he did them, feeling more chipper than he had since the days of his boundary dispute with Sam Thorpe. He had a fair and square claim against the insurance company; he had a piece of Adam's space ship to study; and he had reported the damage at $1296.34, which gave him a safe enough margin in case he'd made a mistake in figuring or overlooked anything, since he actually calculated the damage at $962.57.

He was chopping wood the next morning when the adjuster's investigator, Leonard Brown, arrived. They walked toward the damaged ell. "What kind of plane was it?" he asked.

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"Wasn't exactly a plane — like you'd call airplane," — Joshua said. "More of an air*craft*, like it says in the policy."

"Well, just give me the best description of the thing that you can," Brown said, thinking of jets.

"You might say," Joshua paused to rest the ax against the side of the house, "that it was a circular kind of aircraft, driven by some system Almighty Providence hasn't seen fit to acquaint us with yet."

Brown kept his head. "Are you saying it was what the newspapers call a flying saucer?"

"I'm saying what I seen."

"You know the official opinion of such reports, don't you?"

"That federal government —" Joshua began direly, for his opposition to meddling by that body was as deep-rooted as his thrift.

"What I mean," Brown interrupted, raising his voice, "is that my company has to abide by what's official. Now if there was an airplane flying over . . . Look here, do you have the thing that fell?"

"Ay-yah," Joshua pointed. The thing was lying under an applewood highboy. It was silvery and cylinder-shaped. Brown picked it up. "I'll take it along," he said, placing it outside the door on the grass. "If it's a standard airplane part and if a plane was going over at the time, we'll know where we stand."

"If ifs and ands were pots and pans, there'd be no need for tinkers' hands."

"Well, I'll take your statement. You'll have to sign it."

"I've got my statement, signed and notarized," Joshua said, following him out the door.

Brown turned to look at Joshua, and his foot brushed the cylinder. It began to tip. It fell over and rolled. While the two stood and watched, it rolled until it touched the ax leaning against the side of the house. Then there was the noise, like water thrown on a hot stove, and a little puff of silvery stuff.

Then there was nothing, except the ax-handle, leaning at a new angle against the side of the house.

"Appears like it don't like metal," Joshua finally said. "Though it don't mind wood. Or people."

"That was important evidence." Brown's hands were trembling. "Well . . . you'll hear from us, Mr. Perkins."

"Ay-yah."

Joshua was not downhearted about the turn things had taken; in fact, he was downright cheerful. Knowing that foresight was better than hindsight, he had, the previous afternoon, brought his grandnephew over from Miller's Falls — the one who had the flash camera and could use it well enough to sell pictures to the newspaper every now and then. The boy had taken some

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fine pictures of the object and the damage it did, and if it came down to it, he was sure the boy could take some equally fine pictures of Adam's ship.

Besides that, he'd brought out other witnesses — including an elder of the church, a selectman, and an auto mechanic who was an Air Force veteran — to view the damage and the object. He had their notarized statements telling what they had seen.

He was ready to take his case to the Supreme Court, if need be, and on the strength of it he hired a carpenter to come and fix the house.

A couple of days later, at twilight, Adam came. As he opened the front door, Joshua could see this ship was much bigger than the one Adam usually piloted. Bet it takes more'n one fellow to run that, Joshua thought, but Adam was alone on the porch. "Come to repair the damage," he said.

"Reckon I owe you an apology, too. Plain carelessness."

"I thank you for your kindness," Joshua said. "Now, if I didn't have this insurance, I'd accept your offer." He explained about the policy. "It's bought and paid for. The company is obligated."

"Maybe there's something else we could build then," Adam said. "Make up for the trouble you've been put to."

It could be said that Joshua was of a mind to decline. He didn't want more than was his due. On the other hand, he had had the thought in mind lately of building another henhouse. He was silently recalculating possible profit on 500 pullets, with no cost for their housing, when Adam urged, "Speak up, speak up."

"Reckon it wouldn't hurt to have another henhouse on the place."

Adam led the way to a group of figures standing by stacks of metallic-looking stuff they'd unloaded from the disk. "Reckon you don't know these folks," he said.

"Pleased to meet you," Joshua said, shuffling his feet a little.

"Pleased to meet you," the crew chorused, shuffling their feet a little.

The new structure was soon complete.

"You missed your calling," Joshua said admiringly. "That's a first-rate henhouse." He examined it from all sides. The building was true, with not a sign of poor workmanship anywhere, but it didn't look like anything he'd ever seen before and he couldn't rightly say what it was made of.

He stepped inside, and there was the most mysterious thing of all. It was sound, deep sound, softened as distant roaring, coming and going and coming again. It called something to mind — the conch shell he'd brought back from the seashore some 40 years before.

He brought the shell out from the parlor, handed it to Adam, and showed him how to listen to it.

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"Well, I never," Adam said. "Who would have thought."

Joshua had not seen the little cuss so wonder-struck since that day he had first come across the strange aircraft in his field and found Adam standing on the ground outside, admiring the boulders.

The two of them had stared at each other a long time. Naturally, Joshua was curious but he figured he'd let the trespasser speak first. Finally, Adam opened his mouth — it was more or less the same as Joshua's, except it seemed to have more teeth — and spoke in good English, as clear as anything. (Later, when they got to know each other real well, he explained his quick learning as "immediate telepathic comprehension" or some such.)

He said he greatly admired the boulders and Joshua assured him that he wouldn't find tougher granite anywhere, if that was what he was looking for. Just as a feeler, he proposed that Adam could have half the rocks in the field if he would build the other half into a new stone wall. Adam quickly agreed, which left Joshua feeling cheated.

Not that he had any complaint about having another field cleared and a new wall built, in return for rocks that he had no use for, nor had he any complaint against the ways of the Lord, who made all creatures. It was just that Adam's quick agreement had cost him the chance — by a little horse-trading — to take the stranger's measure.

Still and all, he'd found out that Adam was a reliable little cuss, and a determined one, because he kept returning to fulfill his part of the agreement even after he'd learned how much of the rock was hidden under the surface of the ground, and how hard it was to budge.

Later still, he'd found out that Adam didn't really need the rock, though they didn't have it where he came from, and that Adam's extra-sharp eyes, which had been able to detect its wonder from the sky in the first place, could see things in the crystalline rock that he, Joshua, could not see and that Adam seemed at a loss for words to tell about.

Now there was the same strange pleasure with the conch shell. Adam took it to each of his friends and showed them how to hear it. They were delighted, too.

Joshua hated to part with the shell, but he was beginning to feel a little uneasy about getting the henhouse at no cost. He didn't want to be beholden to anyone. "You take it," he brought himself to say to Adam. A conch shell for a henhouse. It was a fair enough trade.

He installed 500 pullet chicks in the henhouse and soon noticed with satisfaction that they were growing uncommonly fast.

His satisfaction reached its peak when the adjuster, George Whitcomb, visited him. He was gripping Leonard Brown's report and Joshua's sworn

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statement and his face was flushed with anger. "You expect me to swallow this cock-and-bull?" he asked, slapping the reports.

Joshua said nothing.

"You must be suffering from hallucinations, or hysteria, or — or . . ."

"Layers of hot air," Joshua suggested gravely.

Whitcomb's face grew redder. "You'll change your mind if you expect to collect anything," he said, getting back in the car.

"I doubt that damnly," Joshua said.

But news of the henhouse got out and around, and neighbors dropped in on Joshua, asking fool questions and wasting his time. "Well I never," they said when they saw the building. "Come by mail, did it?"

"You might say," Joshua said, "that it came by air express."

"Cost a good deal?" they asked.

"It's paid for," Joshua said.

Worst of all, they said, "You must have struck it rich," and generations of gains hard-won and thriftily held against those less provident or less conscientious made Joshua's reproving reply almost instinctive. "I wouldn't say that," he said.

Even so, there were those with brass enough to ask for a loan.

The crowds grew larger every day.

Neighbors were neighbors, like it or not, but people with out-of-state license plates on their cars were another matter. The thought came to Joshua that the federal government would be sticking its nose in next, and he knew it was time to take a stand. He checked his fences, made sure his KEEP OUT, PRIVATE PROPERTY signs were in plain sight, and barred the gate.

Adam came again, at twilight, in a small disk and alone. They sat on the porch, watching night draw in.

"Hope the henhouse ain't more trouble than it's worth," Adam finally said.

"Wouldn't say that exactly . . . nothing wrong with the henhouse. Trouble is with people. Buzzing around like flies."

"All-fired nuisance," Adam nodded.

"Getting so a body can't call his soul his own. — Course there's been times when there was plenty of folks on this farm, but they was all in the family."

"Ay-yah."

"My grandfather was one of a big family," Joshua began. Calling the roll of his relatives and forebears came easily to him, and he told of those who had stayed to work the farm and those who had moved out to settle places of their own; he recalled those who had been taken young, and those who had lived to 90, hale and hearty; he told of those who had headed west

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and those who had gone to sea. It was a long speech but it was not without purpose. "Though I suppose," he finished, "such journeys sound like small potatoes, compared to yours, in that airship."

". . . Wouldn't say that exactly." Adam seemed thoughtful. "You're welcome to try our land," he finally said. "Though it would seem strange, there's no gainsaying it."

"Don't rightly know whether I should," Joshua answered. "But I'll give it some thought."

He stayed up late that night, trying to decide what was right. In a way he wanted to go, to be free of the world that had closed in around him, but his freedom wouldn't be worth a tinker's damn if he lost his self-respect in going. There was the damage to the ell — he'd committed himself to recover that and couldn't just leave it go. But that was small compared to the claim the past held on him.

He thought of the stone-walled fields that spread around him, of the evergreen slopes of the hills. The roots of the family had been in this land for nearly 300 years, no matter where the branches spread. He had to decide about the place — and about himself. He could stick here and stand the people off, or sell out. He thought of the way family land had been held onto in the past, through good years and bad, by names that were as familiar to his mind as winter wind around the house — Prudence and Ezra, Constance and Asher, Thankful and Timothy. . . . No matter how much he longed for space, his conscience would trouble him forever after if he high-tailed off and left all trace of family land in the hands of outsiders.

He thought of the brook, and of white birches. He thought of johnnycake and dried beef gravy, of succotash and fried apple pies. He wondered at a land that lacked rocks and snow, huckleberry bushes and squirrels, cider vinegar. He thought of long life and sudden death. He brought out the old sea chest, took the papers out of it, and studied them one by one.

He made up his mind.

After the first round of chores the next morning, he took his stand by the gate with a shotgun, and warned off those who thought of trespassing.

Tom Peabody soon drove up and Joshua let him through the gate. "I've come to appeal to your civic pride," he said. "I know how you feel about your rights, Josh, but it won't help the name of this town any if people get shot at out here."

Joshua fired a blast in the direction of a group of people starting over the fence down the line. "All gall, no grit," he muttered as they dropped back down.

George Whitcomb drove up and had to stay in the road. "Why don't

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you handle this thing the way it should be handled or sell out?" he shouted.

"How's my claim?" Joshua called back.

"In the waste basket. If I did anything else with it I'd be the laughingstock."

"Got your lawyers ready or you going to argue the case yourself?"

"You take it to court and you'll be the laughingstock."

"We'll see."

Whitcomb took two cautious steps closer to the gate and his tone turned conciliatory. "How much are you asking for your place, Mr. Perkins?"

"I ain't asking."

"Ah . . . ," Whitcomb cleared his throat. "I'll give you $18,000, just to see that this thing is handled properly."

Joshua snorted.

Whitcomb's mouth tightened, Peabody grinned and Whitcomb offered $19,000. Joshua grunted. Whitcomb raised his price steadily, grimly. Now and then Peabody chipped in with his two cents worth, but both of them might as well have been yelling down rain barrels. Joshua kept blazing away at would-be trespassers. When any fool asked about the price of admission, he just jerked a thumb at the KEEP OUT sign and then waved the shotgun in their general direction. Nobody asked the question twice.

Joshua paused suddenly as he was about to reload. "Not likely to sell a place that's been in the family so long," he said. "Though I suppose that house would make a fine hotel. Especially with a drawing card like that henhouse . . . shouldn't wonder but that's what the stranger had in mind, that one that came around offering to buy."

"What did he offer?" Whitcomb asked hoarsely.

"As I recollect, it was $23,000 . . . but he wanted the herd," Joshua added.

"I'll meet his price and you keep the damned cows."

Joshua shook his head.

"You're a stubborn son of —"

Joshua swung around.

"The soil," Whitcomb finished.

"Stubborn is my middle name," Joshua said. "I don't intend to let go my claim for damage to the ell."

Whitcomb raised his offer to $24,296.34. Peabody stared. Joshua scratched his chin, looked interested for a minute, then shook his head. "If I was to sell, I'd have to keep those new pullets."

"Nothing doing. Those chickens have to go with the place."

"Well, I wasn't thinking of selling anyway."

"Might be wise to start off with a fresh batch of chicks," Tom suggested.

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"Would you agree," Whitcomb shouted, pounding on the gate with each stipulation, "not to use those hens as a competitive attraction, nor divulge the secret of how to construct such a building, nor make use of the knowledge yourself to construct a building to compete with this one?"

"Damage my gate and you'll pay for it," Joshua said.

"Would you agree?"

"Mmmn . . . well . . . ay-ah."

The deal was made.

"I think you've done right," Peabody sighed, "but it must go hard, Josh, to leave the old place."

"No use crying over spilt milk," Joshua said.

He had the whole business straight with his conscience. It was all right to give up on the insurance claim, because he was positive he could have won the case in court. And he had properly settled his score with the man who had blocked his claim. So those matters were all right.

But the biggest task of stilling his conscience lay ahead. Joshua Perkins wasn't going off to some far-off country without leaving some Perkins-owned land behind him. In getting that land, he knew he would meet his match when it came to bargaining with Sam Thorpe. But it had to be done.

Joshua had several talks with Sam while the final papers were being drawn. He took a few trips to the city and also had a visit from Adam.

And he did have a bad time with Sam Thorpe. Sam recollected (just as Joshua had recollected) that the section under discussion had once been part of the Perkins place. He made doubly certain by demanding to see specific old papers in the sea chest. Then — worse yet — he remembered there'd been some misunderstanding when the Perkinses had sold the land to the Thorpes. It seemed that the Thorpes had thought at the time they were buying an entirely different section . . . one that wasn't so rocky.

So Sam named a price that was beyond all reason.

Joshua didn't let on how mad he was. The important thing was to keep square with his conscience. So he mentioned his herd of cows, which he knew Sam coveted, and they finally came to terms. Even so, Joshua put more cash money on the barrel-head than he cared to think about.

Joshua stood on the hill in the early morning, watching the lightening sky. Whatever the cost, this land that stretched around him could be called family land as much as the other and the deed to it was in the sea chest at his feet. He had done his duty to the past.

The disk — the big one — swung into sight, landed, and Adam and the crew tumbled out. "Reckon these should go in first," Joshua shouted, indicating the crates of squawking pullets.

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They loaded the chickens into the passenger compartments, where they instantly quieted down, and then loaded the boxes of johnnycake meal in after them. With johnnycake and eggs Joshua could keep fit until he was accustomed to the new land.

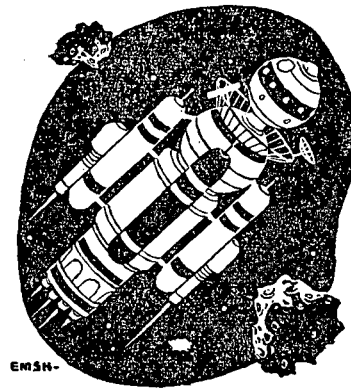
But the most precious cargo went into the hold. Crate after crate of the conch shells he'd bought in the city were loaded into its vast interior. Those were his stock in trade, as good as gold. . . .

The disk shot into the sky, then came down to salute the old Perkins place. From the porthole Joshua could see George Whitcomb standing on the step of his newly-purchased house, staring up at them. Joshua waved farewell. Then, on the inner rim of the disk, he spied a row of cylinders similar to the one that had fallen on the ell.

As he watched, one of them disengaged. It flashed in the sun, and Joshua felt sure, even before it happened, that the cylinder would hit the henhouse.

There was a silvery puff below, and the henhouse was gone.

The ship hesitated, then continued to rise.



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The Model of a Science Fiction Editor

I am the very model of a modern s f editor.
My publisher is happy, as is each and every creditor.
I know the market trends and how to please the newsstand purchaser;
With agents and name authors my relations can't be courteouser.
I've a clever knack of finding out what newsmen want to write about
And seeing that their stories spread my name in black and white about.
I've a colleague to be blamed for the unpleasant sides of bossery,
And I know the masses never quite get tired of flying saucery.
In short in matters monetary, social and promotional,
I am the very model of a pro s f devotional.

I've a pretty taste in literature and know the trends historical
From Plato down to Bradbury in order categorical.
I can tell a warp in space from one that's purely in chronology,
And every BEM I publish has his own strange teratology.
I make my writers stress the small scale human problems solely
Because the sales are better and you might be picked by Foley.
I can stump the highbrow critics with allusions to Caractacus
A ploy that I've perfected by a plenitude of practicus.
In short in matters cultural, esthetical and liter'y
I run the very model of a true s f outfittery.

Now if I had a smattering of knowledge scientifical,
If I were certain "terrene" didn't simply mean "terrifical,"
If I could tell a proton from a neutron or a neuron,
How your weight on Mars will vary from the planet that now you're on,
If I knew enough to know why Velikovsky is nonsensic
And why too close a Shaver can make even hardened fen sick,
If I'd read what men have learned from other planets' spectranalysis,
In short, if I could tell the future Wonderland from Alice's,
I might in logic, insight and inspired extrapolation
Produce the very model of ideal s f creation.

Anthony Boucher

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All readers of fantasy are familiar with The Turn of the Screw — *probably the most famous ghost story in American literature, possibly the best, and certainly the most controversial. (Sometime we shall publish our own completely new interpretation of its ambiguities.) But most readers think of this as an isolated, freak phenomenon in Henry James's work, not realizing that imaginative literature fascinated him throughout his life, that he has left some of the most acute of all critical comments on the nature of fantasy, and that he wrote at least a score of other supernatural fictions. Most of these and many of his sharp critical remarks have been gathered in* THE GHOSTLY TALES OF HENRY JAMES *(Rutgers, 1949), superbly edited by Leon Edel and recommended as a basic item for any fantasy library. A few (not always the most representative) have been anthologized; but* The Friends of the Friends, *to our knowledge, has not hitherto appeared in a fantasy publication. Written only a few months before* The Turn of the Screw, *it resembles that tale in its subtle complexities, its delicate ambivalences, its full-length psychological portrait of a neurotic woman, and above all in (what James knew so well to be the key to imaginative fiction) its use of the supernatural to illuminate the inner reaches of human character.*

The Friends of the Friends

by HENRY JAMES

I FIND, as you prophesied, much that's interesting, but little that helps the delicate question — the possibility of publication. Her diaries are less systematic than I hoped; she only had a blessed habit of noting and narrating. She summarised, she saved; she appears seldom indeed to have let a good story pass without catching it on the wing. I allude of course not so much to things she heard as to things she saw and felt. She writes sometimes of herself, sometimes of others, sometimes of the combination. It's under this last rubric that she's usually most vivid. But it's not, you'll understand, when she's most vivid that she's always most publishable. To tell the truth she's fearfully indiscreet, or has at least all the material for making *me* so. Take as an instance the fragment I send you after dividing it for your convenience into several small chapters. It's the contents of a thin blank-book

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which I've had copied out and which has the merit of being nearly enough a rounded thing, an intelligible whole. These pages evidently date from years ago. I've read with the liveliest wonder the statement they so circumstantially make and done my best to swallow the prodigy they leave to be inferred. These things would be striking, wouldn't they? to any reader; but can you imagine for a moment my placing such a document before the world, even though, as if she herself had desired the world should have the benefit of it, she has given her friends neither name nor initials? Have you any sort of clue to their identity? I leave her the floor.

I know perfectly of course that I brought it upon myself; but that doesn't make it any better. I was the first to speak of her to him — he had never even heard her mentioned. Even if I had happened not to speak some one else would have made up for it: I tried afterwards to find comfort in that reflexion. But the comfort of reflexions is thin: the only comfort that counts in life is not to have been a fool. That's a beatitude I shall doubtless never enjoy. "Why you ought to meet her and talk it over" is what I immediately said. "Birds of a feather flock together." I told him who she was and that they were birds of a feather because if he had had in youth a strange adventure she had had about the same time just such another. It was well known to her friends — an incident she was constantly called on to describe. She was charming clever pretty unhappy; but it was none the less the thing to which she had originally owed her reputation.

Being at the age of eighteen somewhere abroad with an aunt she had had a vision of one of her parents at the moment of death. The parent was in England hundreds of miles away and so far as she knew neither dying nor dead. It was by day, in the museum of some great foreign town. She had passed alone, in advance of her companions, into a small room containing some famous work of art and occupied at that moment by two other persons. One of these was an old custodian; the second, before observing him, she took for a stranger, a tourist. She was merely conscious that he was bareheaded and seated on a bench. The instant her eyes rested on him however she beheld to her amazement her father, who, as if he had long waited for her, looked at her in singular distress and an impatience that was akin to reproach. She rushed to him with a bewildered cry, "Papa, what *is* it?" but this was followed by an exhibition of still livelier feeling when on her movement he simply vanished, leaving the custodian and her relations, who were by that time at her heels, to gather round her in dismay. These persons, the official, the aunt, the cousins, were therefore in a manner witnesses of the fact — the fact at least of the impression made on her; and there was the further testimony of a doctor who was attending one of the

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party and to whom it was immediately afterwards communicated. He gave her a remedy for hysterics, but said to the aunt privately: "Wait and see if something doesn't happen at home." Something *had* happened — the poor father, suddenly and violently seized, had died that morning. The aunt, the mother's sister, received before the day was out a telegram announcing the event and requesting her to prepare her niece for it. Her niece was already prepared, and the girl's sense of this visitation remained of course indelible. We had all, as her friends, had it conveyed to us and had conveyed it creepily to each other. Twelve years had elapsed, and as a woman who had made an unhappy marriage and lived apart from her husband she had become interesting from other sources; but since the name she now bore was a name frequently borne, and since moreover her judicial separation, as things were going, could hardly count as a distinction, it was usual to qualify her as "the one, you know, who saw her father's ghost."

As for him, dear man, he had seen his mother's — so there you are! I had never heard of that till this occasion on which our closer, our pleasanter acquaintance led him, through some turn of the subject of our talk, to mention it and to inspire me in so doing with the impulse to let him know that he had a rival in the field — a person with whom he could compare notes. Later on his story became for him, perhaps because of my unduly repeating it, likewise a convenient worldly label; but it hadn't a year before been the ground on which he was introduced to me. He had other merits, just as she, poor thing, had others. I can honestly say that I was quite aware of them from the first — I discovered them sooner than he discovered mine. I remember how it struck me even at the time that his sense of mine was quickened by my having been able to match, though not indeed straight from my own experience, his curious anecdote. It dated, this anecdote, as hers did, from some dozen years before — a year in which, at Oxford, he had for some reason of his own been staying on into the "Long." He had been in the August afternoon on the river. Coming back into his room while it was still distinct daylight he found his mother standing there as if her eyes had been fixed on the door. He had had a letter from her that morning out of Wales, where she was staying with her father. At the sight of him she smiled with extraordinary radiance and extended her arms to him, and then as he sprang forward and joyfully opened his own she vanished from the place. He wrote to her that night, telling her what had happened: the letter had been carefully preserved. The next morning he heard of her death. He was through this chance of our talk extremely struck with the little prodigy I was able to produce for him. He had never encountered another case. Certainly they ought to meet, my friend and he; certainly they would have something in common. I would arrange this, wouldn't I? — if *she*

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didn't mind; for himself he didn't mind in the least. I had promised to speak to her of the matter as soon as possible, and within the week I was able to do so. She "minded" as little as he; she was perfectly willing to see him. And yet no meeting was to occur — as meetings are commonly understood.

That's just half my tale — the extraordinary way it was hindered. This was the fault of a series of accidents; but the accidents, persisting for years, became, to me and to others, a subject of mirth with either party. They were droll enough at first, then they grew rather a bore. The odd thing was that both parties were amenable: it wasn't a case of their being indifferent, much less of their being indisposed. It was one of the caprices of chance, aided I suppose by some rather settled opposition of their interests and habits. His were centred in his office, his eternal inspectorship, which left him small leisure, constantly calling him away and making him break engagements. He liked society, but he found it everywhere and took it at a run. I never knew at a given moment where he was, and there were times when for months together I never saw him. She was on her side practically suburban: she lived at Richmond and never went "out." She was a woman of distinction, but not of fashion, and felt, as people said, her situation. Decidedly proud and rather whimsical, she lived her life as she had planned it. There were things one could do with her, but one couldn't make her come to one's parties. One went indeed a little more than seemed quite convenient to hers, which consisted of her cousin, a cup of tea and the view. The tea was good; but the view was familiar, though perhaps not, like the cousin — a disagreeable old maid who had been of the group at the museum and with whom she now lived — offensively so. This connexion with an inferior relative, which had partly an economic motive — she proclaimed her companion a marvellous manager — was one of the little perversities we had to forgive her. Another was her estimate of the proprieties created by her rupture with her husband. That was extreme — many persons called it even morbid. She made no advances; she cultivated scruples; she suspected, or I should perhaps rather say she remembered, slights: she was one of the few women I've known whom that particular predicament had rendered modest rather than bold. Dear thing, she had some delicacy! Especially marked were the limits she had set to possible attentions from men: it was always her thought that her husband only waited to pounce on her. She discouraged if she didn't forbid the visits of male persons not senile: she said she could never be too careful.

When I first mentioned to her that I had a friend whom fate had distinguished in the same weird way as herself I put her quite at liberty to say, "Oh bring him out to see me!" I should probably have been able to bring

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him, and a situation perfectly innocent or at any rate comparatively simple would have been created. But she uttered no such word; she only said: "I must meet him certainly; yes, I shall look out for him!" That caused the first delay, and meanwhile various things happened. One of them was that as time went on she made, charming as she was, more and more friends, and that it regularly befell that these friends were sufficiently also friends of his to bring him up in conversation. It was odd that without belonging, as it were, to the same world or, according to the horrid term, the same set, my baffled pair should have happened in so many cases to fall in with the same people and make them join in the droll chorus. She had friends who didn't know each other but who inevitably and punctually recommended *him.* She had also the sort of originality, the intrinsic interest, that led her to be kept by each of us as a private resource, cultivated jealously, more or less in secret, as a person whom one didn't meet in society, whom it was not for every one — whom it was not for the vulgar — to approach, and with whom therefore acquaintance was particularly difficult and particularly precious. We saw her separately, with appointments and conditions, and found it made on the whole for harmony not to tell each other. Somebody had always had a note from her still later than somebody else. There was some silly woman who for a long time, among the unprivileged, owed to three simple visits to Richmond a reputation for being intimate with "lots of awfully clever out-of-the-way people."

Every one has had friends it has seemed a happy thought to bring together, and every one remembers that his happiest thoughts have not been his greatest successes; but I doubt if there was ever a case in which the failure was in such direct proportion to the quantity of influence set in motion. It's really perhaps here the quantity of influence that was most remarkable. My lady and my gentleman each pronounced it to me and others quite a subject for a roaring farce. The reason first given had with time dropped out of sight and 50 better ones flourished on top of it. They were so awfully alike: they had the same ideas and tricks and tastes, the same prejudices and superstitions and heresies; they said the same things and sometimes did them; they liked and disliked the same persons and places, the same books, authors and styles; there were touches of resemblance even in their looks and features. It established much of a propriety that they were in common parlance equally "nice" and almost equally handsome. But the great sameness, for wonder and chatter, was their rare perversity in regard to being photographed. They were the only persons ever heard of who had never been "taken" and who had a passionate objection to it. They just *wouldn't* be — no, not for anything any one could say. I had loudly complained of this; him in particular I had so vainly desired to be able to show

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on my drawing-room chimney-piece in a Bond Street frame. It was at any rate the very liveliest of all the reasons why they ought to know each other — all the lively reasons reduced to naught by the strange law that had made them bang so many doors in each other's face, made them the buckets in the well, the two ends of the see-saw, the two parties in the State, so that when one was up the other was down, when one was out the other was in; neither by any possibility entering a house till the other had left it or leaving it all unawares till the other was at hand. They only arrived when they had been given up, which was precisely also when they departed. They were in a word alternate and incompatible; they missed each other with an inveteracy that could be explained only by its being preconcerted. It was however so far from preconcerted that it had ended — literally after several years — by disappointing and annoying them. I don't think their curiosity was lively till it had been proved utterly vain. A great deal was of course done to help them, but it merely laid wires for them to trip. To give examples I should have to have taken notes; but I happen to remember that neither had ever been able to dine on the right occasion. The right occasion for each was the occasion that would be wrong for the other. On the wrong one they were most punctual, and there were never any but wrong ones. The very elements conspired and the constitution of man reenforced them. A cold, a headache, a bereavement, a storm, a fog, an earthquake, a cataclysm, infallibly intervened. The whole business was beyond a joke.

Yet as a joke it had still to be taken, though one couldn't help feeling that the joke had made the situation serious, had produced on the part of each a consciousness, an awkwardness, a positive dread of the last accident of all, the only one with any freshness left, the accident that *would* bring them together. The final effect of its predecessors had been to kindle this instinct. They were quite ashamed — perhaps even a little of each other. So much preparation, so much frustration: what indeed could be good enough for it all to lead up to? A mere meeting would be mere flatness. Did I see them at the end of years, they often asked, just stupidly confronted? If they were bored by the joke they might be worse bored by something else. They made exactly the same reflexions, and each in some manner was sure to hear of the other's. I really think it was this peculiar diffidence that finally controlled the situation. I mean that if they had failed for the first year or two because they couldn't help it, they kept up the habit because they had — what shall I call it? — grown nervous. It really took some lurking volition to account for anything both so regular and so ridiculous.

When to crown our long acquaintance I accepted his renewed offer of marriage it was humorously said, I know, that I had made the gift of his

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photograph a condition. This was so far true that I had refused to give him mine without it. At any rate I had him at last, in his high distinction, on the chimney-piece, where the day she called to congratulate me she came nearer than she had ever done to seeing him. He had in being taken set her an example that I invited her to follow; he had sacrificed his perversity — wouldn't she sacrifice hers? She too must give me something on my engagement — wouldn't she give me the companion-piece? She laughed and shook her head; she had headshakes whose impulse seemed to come from as far away as the breeze that stirs a flower. The companion-piece to the portrait of my future husband was the portrait of his future wife. She had taken her stand — she could depart from it as little as she could explain it. It was a prejudice, an *entêtement*, a vow — she would live and die unphotographed. Now too she was alone in that state: this was what she liked; it made her so much more original. She rejoiced in the fall of her late associate and looked a long time at his picture, about which she made no memorable remark, though she even turned it over to see the back. About our engagement she was charming — full of cordiality and sympathy. "You've known him even longer than I've *not*," she said, "and that seems a very long time." She understood how we had jogged together over hill and dale and how inevitable it was that we should now rest together. I'm definite about all this because what followed is so strange that it's a kind of relief to me to mark the point up to which our relations were as natural as ever. It was I myself who in a sudden madness altered and destroyed them. I see now that she gave me no pretext and that I only found one in the way she looked at the fine face in the Bond Street frame. How then would I have had her look at it? What I had wanted from the first was to make her care for him. Well, that was what I still wanted — up to the moment of her having promised me she would on this occasion really aid me to break the silly spell that had kept them asunder. I had arranged with him to do his part if she would as triumphantly do hers. I was on a different footing now — I was on a footing to answer for him. I would positively engage that at five on the following Saturday he should be on that spot. He was out of town on pressing business, but, pledged to keep his promise to the letter, would return on purpose and in abundant time. "Are you perfectly sure?" I remember she asked, looking grave and considering: I thought she had turned a little pale. She was tired, she was indisposed: it was a pity he was to see her after all at so poor a moment. If he only *could* have seen her five years before! However, I replied that this time I was sure and that success therefore depended simply on herself. At 5 o'clock on the Saturday she would find him in a particular chair I pointed out, the one in which he usually sat and in which — though this I didn't mention — he had been sitting when, the week before, he

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put the question of our future to me in the way that had brought me round. She looked at it in silence, just as she had looked at the photograph, while I repeated for the twentieth time that it was too preposterous one shouldn't somehow succeed in introducing to one's dearest friend one's second self. "*Am* I your dearest friend?" she asked with a smile that for a moment brought back her beauty. I replied by pressing her to my bosom; after which she said: "Well, I'll come. I'm extraordinarily afraid, but you may count on me."

When she had left me I began to wonder what she was afraid of, for she had spoken as if she fully meant it. The next day, late in the afternoon, I had three lines from her: she found on getting home the announcement of her husband's death. She hadn't seen him for seven years, but she wished me to know it in this way before I should hear of it in another. It made however in her life, strange and sad to say, so little difference that she would scrupulously keep her appointment. I rejoiced for her — I supposed it would make at least the difference of her having more money; but even in this diversion, far from forgetting she had said she was afraid, I seemed to catch sight of a reason for her being so. Her fear, as the evening went on, became contagious, and the contagion took in my breast the form of a sudden panic. It wasn't jealousy — it just was the dread of jealousy. I called myself a fool for not having been quiet till we were man and wife. After that I should somehow feel secure. It was only a question of waiting another month — a trifle surely for people who had waited so long. It had been plain enough she was nervous, and now she was free her nervousness wouldn't be less. What was it therefore but a sharp foreboding? She had been hitherto the victim of interference, but it was quite possible she would henceforth be the source of it. The victim in that case would be my simple self. What had the interference been but the finger of Providence pointing out a danger? The danger was of course for poor *me*. It had been kept at bay by a series of accidents unexampled in their frequency; but the reign of accident was now visibly at an end. I had an intimate conviction that both parties would keep the tryst. It was more and more impressed on me that they were approaching, converging. They were like the seekers for the hidden object in the game of blindfold; they had one and the other begun to "burn." We had talked about breaking the spell; well, it would be effectually broken — unless indeed it should merely take another form and overdo their encounters as it had overdone their escapes. This was something I couldn't sit still for thinking of; it kept me awake — at midnight I was full of unrest. At last I felt there was only one way of laying the ghost. If the reign of accident was over I must just take up the succession. I sat down and wrote a hurried note which would meet him on his return and which as the servants had gone to

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bed I sallied forth bareheaded into the empty gusty street to drop into the nearest pillar-box. It was to tell him that I shouldn't be able to be at home in the afternoon as I had hoped and that he must postpone his visit till dinner-time. This was an implication that he would find me alone.

When accordingly at 5 she presented herself I naturally felt false and base. My act had been a momentary madness, but I had at least, as they say, to live up to it. She remained an hour; he of course never came; and I could only persist in my perfidy. I had thought it best to let her come; singular as this now seems to me I held it diminished my guilt. Yet as she sat there so visibly white and weary, stricken with a sense of everything her husband's death had opened up, I felt a really piercing pang of pity and remorse. If I didn't tell her on the spot what I had done it was because I was too ashamed. I feigned astonishment — I feigned it to the end; I protested that if ever I had had confidence I had had it that day. I blush as I tell my story — I take it as my penance. There was nothing indignant I didn't say about him; I invented suppositions, attenuations; I admitted in stupefaction, as the hands of the clock travelled, that their luck hadn't turned. She smiled at this vision of their "luck," but she looked anxious — she looked unusual: the only thing that kept me up was the fact that, oddly enough, she wore mourning — no great depths of crape, but simple and scrupulous black. She had in her bonnet three small black feathers. She carried a little muff of astrachan. This put me, by the aid of some acute reflexion, a little in the right. She had written to me that the sudden event made no difference for her, but apparently it made as much difference as that. If she was inclined to the usual forms why didn't she observe that of not going the first day or two out to tea? There was some one she wanted so much to see that she couldn't wait till her husband was buried. Such a betrayal of eagerness made me hard and cruel enough to practise my odious deceit, though at the same time, as the hour waxed and waned, I suspected in her something deeper still than disappointment and somewhat less successfully concealed. I mean a strange underlying relief, the soft low emission of the breath that comes when a danger is past. What happened as she spent her barren hour with me was that at last she gave him up. She let him go for ever. She made the most graceful joke of it that I've ever seen made of anything; but it was for all that a great date in her life. She spoke with her mild gaiety of all the other vain times, the long game of hide-and-seek, the unprecedented queerness of such a relation. For it *was*, or had been, a relation, wasn't it, hadn't it? That was just the absurd part of it. When she got up to go I said to her that it was more a relation than ever, but that I hadn't the face after what had occurred to propose to her for the present another opportunity. It

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was plain that the only valid opportunity would be my accomplished marriage. Of course she would be at my wedding? It was even to be hoped that *he* would.

"If *I* am, he won't be!" — I remember the high quaver and the little break of her laugh. I admitted there might be something in that. The thing was therefore to get us safely married first. "That won't help us. Nothing will help us!" she said as she kissed me farewell. "I shall never, never see him!" It was with those words she left me.

I could bear her disappointment as I've called it; but when a couple of hours later I received him at dinner I discovered I couldn't bear his. The way my manoeuvre might have affected him hadn't been particularly present to me; but the result of it was the first word of reproach that had ever yet dropped from him. I say "reproach" because that expression is scarcely too strong for the terms in which he conveyed to me his surprise that under the extraordinary circumstances I shouldn't have found some means not to deprive him of such an occasion. I might really have managed either not to be obliged to go out or to let their meeting take place all the same. They would probably have got on, in my drawing-room, well enough without me. At this I quite broke down — I confessed my iniquity and the miserable reason of it. I hadn't put her off and I hadn't gone out; she had been there and, after waiting for him an hour, had departed in the belief that he had been absent by his own fault.

"She must think me a precious brute!" he exclaimed. "Did she say of me" — and I remember the just perceptible catch of breath in his pause — "what she had a right to say?"

"I assure you she said nothing that showed the least feeling. She looked at your photograph, she even turned round the back of it, on which your address happens to be inscribed. Yet it provoked her to no demonstration. She doesn't care so much as all that."

"Then why are you afraid of her?"

"It wasn't of her I was afraid. It was of you."

"Did you think I'd be so sure to fall in love with her? You never alluded to such a possibility before," he went on as I remained silent. "Admirable person as you pronounced her, that wasn't the light in which you showed her to me."

"Do you mean that if it *had* been you'd have managed by this time to catch a glimpse of her? I didn't fear things then," I added. "I hadn't the same reason."

He kissed me at this, and when I remembered that she had done so an hour or two before I felt for an instant as if he were taking from my lips the very pressure of hers. In spite of kisses the incident had shed a certain chill,

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and I suffered horribly from the sense that he had seen me guilty of a fraud. He had seen it only through my frank avowal, but I was as unhappy as if I had a stain to efface. I couldn't get over the manner of his looking at me when I spoke of her apparent indifference to his not having come. For the first time since I had known him he seemed to have expressed a doubt of my word. Before we parted I told him that I'd undeceive her — start the first thing in the morning for Richmond and there let her know he had been blameless. At this he kissed me again. I'd expiate my sin, I said; I'd humble myself in the dust; I'd confess and ask to be forgiven. At this he kissed me once more.

In the train the next day this struck me as a good deal for him to have consented to; but my purpose was firm enough to carry me on. I mounted the long hill to where the view begins, and then I knocked at her door. I was a trifle mystified by the fact that her blinds were still drawn, reflecting that if in the stress of my compunction I had come early I had certainly yet allowed people time to get up.

"At home, mum? She has left home for ever."

I was extraordinarily startled by this announcement of the elderly parlour-maid. "She has gone away?"

"She's dead, mum, please." Then as I gasped at the horrible word: "She died last night."

The loud cry that escaped me sounded even in my own ears like some harsh violation of the hour. I felt for the moment as if I had killed her; I turned faint and saw through a vagueness that woman hold out her arms to me. Of what next happened I've no recollection, nor of anything but my friend's poor stupid cousin, in a darkened room, after an interval that I suppose very brief, sobbing at me in a smothered accusatory way. I can't say how long it took me to understand, to believe and then to press back with an immense effort that pang of responsibility which, superstitiously, insanely, had been at first almost all I was conscious of. The doctor, after the fact, had been superlatively wise and clear: he was satisfied of a long-latent weakness of the heart, determined probably years before by the agitations and terrors to which her marriage had introduced her. She had had in those days cruel scenes with her husband, she had been in fear of her life. All emotion, everything in the nature of anxiety and suspense had been after that to be strongly deprecated, as in her marked cultivation of a quiet life she was evidently well aware; but who could say that any one, especially a "real lady," might be successfully protected from *every* little rub? She had had one a day or two before in the news of her husband's death — since there were shocks of all kinds, not only those of grief and surprise. For that matter

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she had never dreamed of so near a release: it had looked uncommonly as if he would live as long as herself. Then in the evening, in town, she had manifestly had some misadventure: something must have happened there that it would be imperative to clear up. She had come back very late — it was past 11 o'clock, and on being met in the hall by her cousin, who was extremely anxious, had allowed she was tired and must rest a moment before mounting the stairs. They had passed together into the dining-room, her companion proposing a glass of wine and bustling to the sideboard to pour it out. This took but a moment, and when my informant turned round our poor friend had not had time to seat herself. Suddenly, with a small moan that was barely audible, she dropped upon the sofa. She was dead. What unknown "little rub" had dealt her the blow? What concussion, in the name of wonder, *had* awaited her in town? I mentioned immediately the one thinkable ground of disturbance — her having failed to meet at my house, to which by invitation for the purpose she had come at 5 o'clock, the gentleman I was to be married to, who had been accidentally kept away and with whom she had no acquaintance whatever. This obviously counted for little; but something else might easily have occurred: nothing in the London streets was more possible than an accident, especially an accident in those desperate cabs. What had she done, where had she gone on leaving my house? I had taken for granted she had gone straight home. We both presently remembered that in her excursions to town she sometimes, for convenience, for refreshment, spent an hour or two at the "Gentlewomen," the quiet little ladies' club, and I promised that it should be my first care to make at that establishment an earnest appeal. Then we entered the dim and dreadful chamber where she lay locked up in death and where, asking after a little to be left alone with her, I remained for half an hour. Death had made her, had kept her beautiful; but I felt above all, as I kneeled at her bed, that it had made her, had kept her silent. It had turned the key on something I was concerned to know.

On my return from Richmond and after another duty had been performed I drove to his chambers. It was the first time, but I had often wanted to see them. On the staircase, which, as the house contained twenty sets of rooms, was unrestrictedly public, I met his servant, who went back with me and ushered me in. At the sound of my entrance he appeared in the doorway of a further room, and the instant we were alone I produced my news: "She's dead!"

"Dead?" He was tremendously struck, and I noticed he had no need to ask whom, in this abruptness, I meant.

"She died last evening — just after leaving me."

He stared with the strangest expression, his eyes searching mine as for a

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trap. "Last evening — after leaving you?" He repeated my words in stupefaction. Then he brought out, so that it was in stupefaction I heard, "Impossible! I saw her."

"You 'saw' her?"

"On that spot — where you stand."

This called back to me after an instant, as if to help me to take it in, the great wonder of the warning of his youth. "In the hour of death — I understand: as you so beautifully saw your mother."

"Ah *not* as I saw my mother — not that way, not that way!" He was deeply moved by my news — far more moved, it was plain, than he would have been the day before: it gave me a vivid sense that, as I had then said to myself, there was indeed a relation between them and that he had actually been face to face with her. Such an idea, by its reassertion of his extraordinary privilege, would have suddenly presented him as painfully abnormal hadn't he vehemently insisted on the difference. "I saw her living. I saw her to speak to her. I saw her as I see you now."

It's remarkable that for a moment, though only for a moment, I found relief in the more personal, as it were, but also the more natural, of the two odd facts. The next, as I embraced this image of her having come to him on leaving me and of just what it accounted for in the disposal of her time, I demanded with a shade of harshness of which I was aware: "What on earth did she come for?"

He had now had a minute to think — to recover himself and judge of effects, so that if it was still with excited eyes he spoke he showed a conscious redness and made an inconsequent attempt to smile away the gravity of his words. "She came just to see me. She came — after what had passed at your house — so that we *should*, nevertheless at last meet. The impulse seemed to me exquisite, and that was the way I took it."

I looked round the room where she had been — where *she* had been and I never had till now. "And was the way you took it the way she expressed it?"

"She only expressed it by being here and by letting me look at her. That was enough!" he cried with an extraordinary laugh.

I wondered more and more. "You mean she didn't speak to you?"

"She said nothing. She only looked at me as I looked at her."

"And you didn't speak either?"

He gave me again his painful smile. "I thought of *you*. The situation was every way delicate. I used the finest tact. But she saw she had pleased me." He even repeated his dissonant laugh.

"She evidently 'pleased' you!" Then I thought a moment. "How long did she stay?"

"How can I say? It seemed twenty minutes, but it was probably less."

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"Twenty minutes of silence!" I began to have my definite view and now in fact quite to clutch at it. "Do you know you're telling me a thing positively monstrous?"

He had been standing with his back to the fire; at this, with a pleading look, he came to me. "I beseech you, dearest, to take it kindly."

I could take it kindly, and I signified as much; but I couldn't somehow, as he rather awkwardly opened his arms, let him draw me to him. So there fell between us for an appreciable time the discomfort of a great silence.

He broke it by presently saying: "There's absolutely no doubt of her death?"

"Unfortunately none. I've just risen from my knees by the bed where they've laid her out."

He fixed his eyes hard on the floor; then he raised them to mine. "How does she look?"

"She looks — at peace."

He turned away again while I watched him; but after a moment he began: "At what hour then — —?"

"It must have been near midnight. She dropped as she reached her house — from an affection of the heart which she knew herself and her physician knew her to have, but of which, patiently, bravely, she had never spoken to me."

He listened intently and for a minute was unable to speak. At last he broke out with an accent of which the almost boyish confidence, the really sublime simplicity, rings in my ears as I write: "Wasn't she *wonderful!*" Even at the time I was able to do it justice enough to answer that I had always told him so; but the next minute, as if after speaking he had caught a glimpse of what he might have made me feel, he went on quickly: "You can easily understand that if she didn't get home till midnight — —"

I instantly took him up. "There was plenty of time for you to have seen her? How so," I asked, "when you didn't leave my house till late? I don't remember the very moment — I was preoccupied. But you know that though you said you had lots to do you sat for some time after dinner. She, on her side, was all the evening at the 'Gentlewomen,' I've just come from there — I've ascertained. She had tea there; she remained a long long time."

"What was she doing all the long long time?"

I saw him eager to challenge at every step my account of the matter; and the more he showed this the more I was moved to emphasise that version, to prefer with apparent perversity an explanation which only deepened the marvel and the mystery, but which, of the two prodigies it

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had to choose from, my reviving jealousy found easiest to accept. He stood there pleading with a candor that now seems to me beautiful for the privilege of having in spite of supreme defeat known the living woman; while I, with a passion I wonder at today, though it still smolders in a manner in its ashes, could only reply that, through a strange gift shared by her with his mother and on her own side likewise hereditary, the miracle of his youth had been renewed for him, the miracle of hers for her. She had been to him — yes, and by an impulse as charming as he liked; but oh she hadn't been in the body! It was a simple question of evidence. I had had, I maintained, a definite statement of what she had done — most of the time — at the little club. The place was almost empty, but the servants had noticed her. She had sat motionless in a deep chair by the drawing-room fire; she had leaned back her head, she had closed her eyes, she had seemed softly to sleep.

"I see. But till what o'clock?"

"There," I was obliged to answer, "the servants fail me a little. The portress in particular is unfortunately a fool, even though she too is supposed to be a Gentlewoman. She was evidently at that period of the evening, without a substitute and against regulations, absent for some little time from the cage in which it's her business to watch the comings and goings. She's muddled, she palpably prevaricates; so I can't positively, from her observation, give you an hour. But it was remarked toward half-past 10 that our poor friend was no longer in the club."

It suited him down to the ground. "She came straight here, and from here she went straight to the train."

"She couldn't have run it so close," I declared. "She never did that."

"There was no need of running it close, my dear — she had plenty of time. Your memory's at fault about my having left you late: I left you, as it happens, unusually early. I'm sorry my stay with you seemed long, for I was back here by 10."

"To put yourself into your slippers," I retorted, "and fall asleep in your chair. You slept till morning — you saw her in a dream!" He looked at me in silence and with sombre eyes — eyes that showed me he had some irritation to repress. Presently I went on: "You had a visit, at an extraordinary hour, from a lady — *soit:* nothing in the world's more probable. But there are ladies and ladies. How in the name of goodness, if she was unannounced and dumb and you had into the bargain never seen the least portrait of her — how could you identify the person we're talking of?"

"Haven't I to absolute satiety heard her described? I'll describe her for you in every particular."

"Don't!" I cried with a promptness that made him laugh once more. I colored at this, but I continued: "Did your servant introduce her?"

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"He wasn't here — he's always away when he's wanted. One of the features of this big house is that from the street-door the different floors are accessible practically without challenge. My servant makes love to a young person employed in the rooms above these, and he had a long bout of it last evening. When he's out on that job he leaves my outer door, on the staircase, so much ajar as to enable him to slip back without a sound. The door then only requires a push. She pushed it — that simply took a little courage."

"A little? It took tons! And it took all sorts of impossible calculations."

"Well, she had them — she made them. Mind you, I don't deny for a moment," he added," that it was very very wonderful!"

Something in his tone kept me a time from trusting myself to speak. At last I said: "How did she come to know where you live?"

"By remembering the address on the little label the shop-people happily left sticking to the frame I had had made for my photograph."

"And how was she dressed?"

"In mourning, my own dear. No great depths of crape, but simple and scrupulous black. She had in her bonnet three small black feathers. She carried a little muff of astrachan. She has near the left eye," he continued, "a tiny vertical scar —"

I stopped him short. "The mark of a caress from her husband." Then I added: "How close you must have been to her!" He made no answer to this, and I thought he blushed, observing which I broke straight off. "Well, good-bye."

"You won't stay a little?" He came to me again tenderly, and this time I suffered him. "Her visit had its beauty," he murmured as he held me, "but yours has a greater one."

I let him kiss me, but I remembered, as I had remembered the day before, that the last kiss she had given, as I supposed, in this world had been for the lips he touched. "I'm life, you see," I answered. "What you saw last night was death."

"It was life — it was life!"

He spoke with a soft stubbornness — I disengage myself. We stood looking at each other hard. "You describe the scene — so far as you describe it at all — in terms that are incomprehensible. She was in the room before you knew it?"

"I looked up from my letter-writing — at that table under the lamp I had been wholly absorbed in it — and she stood before me."

"Then what did you do?"

"I sprang up with an ejaculation, and she, with a smile, laid her finger, ever so warningly, yet with a sort of delicate dignity, to her lips. I knew it

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meant silence, but the strange thing was that it seemed immediately to explain and to justify her. We at any rate stood for a time that, as I've told you, I can't calculate, face to face. It was just as you and I stand now."

"Simply staring?"

He shook an impatient head. "Ah! *we're* not staring!"

"Yes, but we're talking."

"Well, *we* were — after a fashion." He lost himself in the memory of it. "It was as friendly as this." I had on my tongue's end to ask if that was saying much for it, but I made the point instead that what they had evidently done was to gaze in mutual admiration. Then I asked if his recognition of her had been immediate. "Not quite," he replied, "for of course I didn't expect her; but it came to me long before she went who she was."

I thought a little. "And how did she at last go?"

"Just as she arrived. The door was open behind her and she passed out."

"Was she rapid — slow?"

"Rather quick. But looking behind her," he smiled to add. "I let her go, for I perfectly knew I was to take it as she wished."

I was conscious of exhaling a long vague sigh. "Well, you must take it now as *I* wish — you must let *me* go."

At this he drew near me again, detaining and persuading me, declaring with all due gallantry that I was a very different matter. I'd have given anything to have been able to ask him if he had touched her, but the words refused to form themselves: I knew to the last tenth of a tone how horrid and vulgar they'd sound. I said something else — I forget exactly what; it was feebly tortuous and intended, meanly enough, to make him tell me without my putting the question. But he didn't tell me; he only repeated, as from a glimpse of the propriety of soothing and consoling me, the sense of his declaration of some minutes before — the assurance that she was indeed exquisite, as I had always insisted, but that I was his "real" friend and his very own for ever. This led me to reassert, in the spirit of my previous rejoinder, that I had at least the merit of being alive; which in turn drew from him again the flash of contradiction I dreaded. "Oh *she* was alive! She was, she was!"

"She was dead, she was dead!" I asseverated with an energy, a determination it should *be* so, which comes back to me now almost as grotesque. But the sound of the word as it rang out filled me suddenly with horror, and all the natural emotion the meaning of it might have evoked in other conditions gathered and broke in a flood. It rolled over me that here was a great affection quenched and how much I had loved and trusted her. I had a vision at the same time of the lonely beauty of her end. "She's gone — she's lost to us for ever!" I burst into sobs.

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"That's exactly what I feel," he exclaimed, speaking with extreme kindness and pressing me to him for comfort. "She's gone; she's lost to us for ever: so what does it matter now?" He bent over me, and when his face had touched mine I scarcely knew if it were wet with my tears or with his own.

It was my theory, my conviction, it became, as I may say, my attitude, that they had still never "met"; and it was just on this ground I felt it generous to ask him to stand with me at her grave. He did so very modestly and tenderly, and I assumed, though he himself clearly cared nothing for the danger, that the solemnity of the occasion, largely made up of persons who had known them both and had a sense of the long joke, would sufficiently deprive his presence of all light association. On the question of what had happened the evening of her death little more passed between us; I had been taken by a horror of the element of evidence. On either hypothesis it was gross and prying. He on his side lacked producible corroboration — everything, that is, but a statement of his house-porter, on his own admission a most casual and intermittent personage — that between the hours of 10 o'clock and midnight no less than three ladies in deep black had flitted in and out of the place. This proved far too much; we had neither of us any use for three. He knew I considered I had accounted for every fragment of her time, and we dropped the matter as settled; we abstained from further discussion. What *I* knew however was that he abstained to please me rather than because he yielded to my reasons. He didn't yield — he was only indulgent; he clung to his interpretation because he liked it better. He liked it better, I held, because it had more to say to his vanity. That, in a similar position, wouldn't have been its effect on me, though I had doubtless quite as much; but these are things of individual humour and as to which no person can judge for another. I should have supposed it more gratifying to be the subject of one of those inexplicable occurrences that are chronicled in thrilling books and disputed about at learned meetings; I could conceive, on the part of a being just engulfed in the infinite and still vibrating with human emotion, of nothing more fine and pure, more high and august, than such an impulse of reparation, of admonition, or even of curiosity. *That* was beautiful, if one would, and I should in his place have thought more of myself for being so distinguished and so selected. It was public that he had already, that he had long figured in that light, and what was such a fact in itself but almost a proof? Each of the strange visitations contributed to establish the other. He had a different feeling; but he had also, I hasten to add, an unmistakable desire not to make a stand or, as they say, a fuss about it. I might believe what I liked — the more so that the whole thing was in a manner a mystery of my producing. It was an event of my history, a puzzle

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of my consciousness, not of his; therefore he would take about it any tone that struck me as convenient. We had both at all events other business on hand; we were pressed with preparations for our marriage.

Mine were assuredly urgent, but I found as the days went on that to believe what I "liked" was to believe what I was more and more intimately convinced of. I found also that I didn't like it so much as that came to, or that the pleasure at all events was far from being the cause of my conviction. My obsession, as I may really call it and as I began to perceive, refused to be elbowed away, as I had hoped, by my sense of paramount duties. If I had a great deal to do I had still more to think of, and the moment came when my occupations were gravely menaced by my thoughts. I see it all now, I feel it, I live it over. It's terribly void of joy, it's full indeed to overflowing of bitterness; and yet I must do myself justice — I couldn't have been other than I was. The same strange impressions, had I to meet them again, would produce the same deep anguish, the same sharp doubts, the same still sharper certainties. Oh it's all easier to remember than to write, but even could I retrace the business hour by hour, could I find terms for the inexpressible, the ugliness and the pain would quickly stay my hand. Let me then note very simply and briefly that a week before our wedding-day, three weeks after her death, I knew in all my fibres that I had something very serious to look in the face and that if I was to make this effort I must make it on the spot and before another hour should elapse. My unextinguished jealousy — that was the Medusa-mask. It hadn't died with her death, it had lividly survived, and it was fed by suspicions unspeakable. They *would* be unspeakable today, that is, if I hadn't felt the sharp need of uttering them at the time. This need took possession of me — to save me, as it seemed, from my fate. When once it had done so I saw — in the urgency of the case, the diminishing hours and shrinking interval — only one issue, that of absolute promptness and frankness. I could at least not do him the wrong of delaying another day; I could at least treat my difficulty as too fine for a subterfuge. Therefore very quietly, but none the less abruptly and hideously, I put it before him on a certain evening that we must reconsider our situation and recognise that it had completely altered.

He stared bravely. "How in the world altered?"

"Another person has come between us."

He took but an instant to think. "I won't pretend not to know whom you mean." He smiled in pity for my aberration, but he meant to be kind. "A woman dead and buried!"

"She's buried, but she's not dead. She's dead for the world — she's dead for me. But she's not dead for you."

"You hark back to the different construction we put on her appearance?"

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"No," I answered, "I hark back to nothing. I've no need of it. I've more than enough with what's before me."

"And pray, darling, what may that be?"

"You're completely changed."

"By that absurdity?" he laughed.

"Not so much by that one as by other absurdities that have followed it."

"And what may *they* have been?"

We had faced each other fairly, with eyes that didn't flinch; but his had a dim strange light, and my certitude triumphed in his perceptible paleness. "Do you really pretend," I asked, "not to know what they are?"

"My dear child," he replied, "you describe them too sketchily!"

I considered a moment. "One may well be embarrassed to finish the picture! But from that point of view — and from the beginning — what was ever more embarrassing than your idiosyncrasy?"

He invoked his vagueness — a thing he always did beautifully. "My idiosyncrasy?"

"Your notorious, your peculiar power."

He gave a great shrug of impatience, a groan of overdone disdain. "Oh my peculiar power!"

"Your accessibility to forms of life," I coldly went on, "your command of impressions, appearances, contacts, closed — for our gain or our loss — to the rest of us. That was originally a part of the deep interest with which you inspired me — one of the reasons I was amused, I was indeed positively proud, to know you. It was a magnificent distinction; it's a magnificent distinction still. But of course I had no prevision then of the way it would operate now; and even had that been the case I should have had none of the extraordinary way of which its action would affect me."

"To what in the name of goodness," he pleadingly enquired, "are you fantastically alluding?" Then as I remained silent, gathering a tone for my charge, "How in the world *does* it operate?" he went on; "and how in the world are you affected?"

"She missed you for five years," I said, "but she never misses you now. You're making it up!"

"Making it up?" He had begun to turn from white to red.

"You see her — you see her: you see her every night!" He gave a loud sound of derision, but I felt it ring false. "She comes to you as she came that evening," I declared; "having tried it she found she liked it!" I was able, with God's help, to speak without blind passion or vulgar violence; but those were the exact words — and far from "sketchy" they then appeared to me — that I uttered. He had turned away in his laughter, clapping his hands at my folly, but in an instant he faced me again with a change

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of expression that struck me. "Do you dare to deny," I then asked, "that you habitually see her?"

He had taken the line of indulgence, of meeting me halfway and kindly humouring me. At all events he to my astonishment suddenly said: "Well, my dear, what if I do?"

"It's your natural right: it belongs to your constitution and to your wonderful if not perhaps quite enviable fortune. But you'll easily understand that it separates us. I unconditionally release you."

"Release me?"

"You must choose between me and her."

He looked at me hard. "I see." Then he walked away a little, as if grasping what I had said and thinking how he had best treat it. At last he turned on me afresh. "How on earth do you know such an awfully private thing?"

"You mean because you've tried so hard to hide it? It *is* awfully private, and you may believe I shall never betray you. You've done your best, you've acted your part, you've behaved, poor dear! loyally and admirably. Therefore I've watched you in silence, playing my part too; I've noted every drop in your voice, every absence in your eyes, every effort in your indifferent hand: I've waited till I was utterly sure and miserably unhappy. How *can* you hide it when you're abjectly in love with her, when you're sick almost to death with the joy of what she gives you?" I checked his quick protest with a quicker gesture. "You love her as you've *never* loved, and, passion for passion, she gives it straight back! She rules you, she holds you, she has you all! A woman, in such a case as mine, divines and feels and sees; she's not a dull dunce who has to be 'credibly informed.' You come to me mechanically, compunctiously, with the dregs of your tenderness and the remnant of your life. I can renounce you, but I can't share you: the best of you is hers, I know what it is and freely give you up to her for ever!"

He made a gallant fight, but it couldn't be patched up; he repeated his denial, he retracted his admission, he ridiculed my charge, of which I freely granted him moreover the indefensible extravagance. I didn't pretend for a moment that we were talking of common things; I didn't pretend for a moment that he and she were common people. Pray, if they *had* been, how should I ever have cared for them? They had enjoyed a rare extension of being and they had caught me up in their flight; only I couldn't breathe in such air and I promptly asked to be set down. Everything in the facts was monstrous, and most of all my lucid perception of them; the only thing allied to nature and truth was my having to act on that perception. I felt after I had spoken in this sense that my assurance was complete; nothing had been wanting to it but the sight of my effect on him. He disguised indeed the effect in a cloud of chaff, a diversion that gained him time and

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covered his retreat. He challenged my sincerity, my sanity, almost my humanity, and that of course widened our breach and confirmed our rupture. He did everything in short but convince me either that I was wrong or that he was unhappy: we separated and I left him to his inconceivable communion.

He never married, any more than I've done. When six years later, in solitude and silence, I heard of his death I hailed it as a direct contribution to my theory. It was sudden, it was never properly accounted for, it was surrounded by circumstances in which — for oh I took them to pieces! — I distinctly read an intention, the mark of his own hidden hand. It was the result of a long necessity, of an unquenchable desire. To say exactly what I mean, it was a response to an irresistible call.

The Antiquary

Gobban the Smith taught me the ancient songs
Of Weland, lame and waiting at his forge;
The master-craftsman striking for his grudge —
His head was bent, remembering old wrongs.

Gobban the Smith showed me the round towers,
Enchanted arches builded by a prince
Who mutters where the window-pattern tints
The lady charmed, uncertain of her powers.

Where lies the armor, gleaming dragon-rings?
Which mystery marks blood-wound of the dead?
What wraith by what cold lake his lost king grieves?
Whose eyes regarded us through rustled leaves?
Whose ears had heard the wicked spell we said?
Gobban the Smith and I know all these things.

WINONA MCCLINTIC

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

SINCE 1940, when Robert A. Heinlein's first serial was published, no work of fiction has caused as much pleasurable excitement among readers of science fiction as the serialization of Alfred Bester's THE DEMOLISHED MAN. Such excitement should be renewed and intensified to an even headier pitch by the appearance of that novel, extensively revised and rewritten, in hard-covers (Shasta). A taut, surrealistic melodrama, the story is a masterful compounding of science and detective fiction.

But it is no routine puzzle of *who*; reader and detective know the killer's identity from the beginning. The suspense lies in the chase, in the murderer's magnificent — one can't help but admire him! — effort to match his mind against the better endowed telepath detective. And the puzzle — most brilliantly conceived and fairly clued — is *why*; not even the murderer is consciously aware of the real motive for his crime!

Just as fascinating is Mr. Bester's setting of this criminological problem in a society, ruthless and money-mad on the surface, that is dominated and being subtly reshaped by telepaths. While his picture of that future civilization is not a perfect whole, tending at times to be a sort of piecemeal report, he does state the problem of such a culture in no uncertain terms and clearly delineates its one inevitable answer. Oddly, his telepaths emerge as more convincing people than do his "normal" characters; very likely this is due to his concentration on the unassailable argument that ESP man is always, in the ultimate analysis, a *man* . . . and must live as such.

But these science and detective fictional enlargements, however perceptively done, are asides; Mr. Bester never forgets that his main job is to tell a story. The riches of his imagination are ever disciplined to his prime purpose, to carry the reader headlong from a savage, useless killing to the inescapable, curious fate of the killer.

High praise of any science fiction novel seems almost always to involve the phrase "not since Heinlein"; and in order to do justice to THE SPACE MERCHANTS by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth (Ballantine), we must repeat ourselves. The Heinlein virtue captured here, as hardly any other author has done since Heinlein began his Future History, is the detailedly plausible projection of a complete future society, from its basic concepts

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down to its tiniest minutiae. The terrifying future envisioned by Messrs. Pohl and Kornbluth is one which could be the longed-for Utopia of any account executive in any advertising agency, a world in which advertising has established itself as an economic oligarchy and social aristocracy; and the authors have developed a sharp melodrama of power-conflict and revolt which manages, in its very plot-structure, to explore all the implied developments of such a society. Bitter, satiric, exciting, this is easily one of the major works of logical extrapolation in several years. (Like the Bester novel, this is extensively rewritten and somewhat abridged from its serial version as GRAVY PLANET; unlike the Bester, the alterations and particularly the cuts are largely for the better.)

For lighter diversion in fiction of the future, you can turn to Kendall Foster Crossen's ONCE UPON A STAR (Holt) — not "a novel," as the publishers would have it, but a series of elaborately ingenious stories of the interstellar encounters of Manning Draco, investigator for the Greater Solarian Insurance Company Monopolated, and Dzanku Dzanku of Rigel IV, foremost conman of this galaxy; agreeably foolish smokingroom anecdotes which may serve as welcome relief to the more ponderously sober future histories. And if you simply want all-out, hell-for-plastikoid space opera, complete with aphrodisiac-smugglers, alien invaders, and dashing Solar agents, you can do much worse than George O. Smith's conventional but lively and well-gimmicked HELLFLOWER (Abelard).

We commented recently on Groff Conklin's relenting so far as to include some straight fantasy in his last "science fiction" anthology; now (with his wife Lucy for the first time receiving a by-line instead of a prefatory thank-you) he has produced a complete volume of "pure" fantasy in THE SUPERNATURAL READER (Lippincott). Most of the 27 stories have appeared before in hard covers, usually in omnibuses of their authors' works; but none are available in any modern American anthology — which is all but unbelievable in view of the quality of some of the sheer classics here assembled. There's no particular pattern to the collection; it's simply, like an unusually good issue of an unusually large magazine, a gathering of distinguished stories of the imagination, almost all of them, we think, especially calculated to appeal to the readers of F&SF.

Allan Barnard's THE HARLOT KILLER (Dodd, Mead), essentially a collection of criminous fact and fiction about Jack the Ripper, includes two fantasy stories: inevitably Robert Bloch's celebrated chiller and (to our delight) one of our personal favorites among all of F&SF's "firsts," Kay Rogers' *Love Story*. Murder and fantasy alternate and blend in John Collier's FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS (Bantam), a volume which, in its 1951 hardcover appearance, won the International Fantasy Award, received

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Mystery Writers of America's Edgar award for crime shorts, and left us speechlessly groping for adequate superlatives. Mr. Collier is simply The Master; that's all there is to it. If you don't buy another book all year (or even — perish the thought — another magazine), this you must get!

Gerald Heard has completely revised IS ANOTHER WORLD WATCHING? for its paperback edition (Bantam), expanding it and bringing it up to date — and still keeping it as bafflingly schizoid a book as ever a poor reviewer tried to cope with. The factual data on "flying saucers" is well presented and the eager oversimplifiers are justly rebuked; the fantasy fiction on intelligent Martian superbees is in its odd way charming; and it's up to you to decide just how much of the book Mr. Heard intends you to take seriously.

If Heard presents fiction as fact, Edwin A. Abbott does a magnificent job in FLATLAND (Dover) of offering perfectly serious scientific thinking as satiric fiction. This 70-year-old story (originally published as by "A Square") of the two-dimensional individual who learned to comprehend three-dimensional existence has never been bettered for clarity of mathematical thought; the analogical understanding of four-dimensional space that we limited three-dimensional beings can thereby attain is a wonderfully healthy corrective to all of the science fiction nonsense that has been written about "The Fourth Dimension."

The whole question of the nature of scientific thought and imagination is the subject of J. Bronowski's THE COMMON SENSE OF SCIENCE (Harvard). This Polish-English statistician (research director for the National Coal Board, star radio panelist of the BBC, and author of a book on William Blake) is that fabulous rarity: a genuinely cultured man — a trained scientist with a deep knowledge of history and the arts, and with a mind capable of integrating all aspects of man's civilization — and incapable of confusing science with technology. This brief and admirably written book is a splendidly clear primer for the layman on the historic development of scientific thinking, the factors which distinguish contemporary attitudes in science, and the possible trends to come — recommended reading for the devotees of science fiction, and required reading for s. f. writers.

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Here is something rare in science fiction . . . or in any fiction, for that matter: a long story with only one character. But it is a story, *complete with suspense and conflict, for that one character is himself the warring-ground for the ideologies of two entire racial cultures: the harsh bureaucracy of his own people and the more complex (but not necessarily different) subtlety of a long-vanished empire. Only a writer as skilled as Miss Seabright could treat such a theme in such a manner; but in her hands it becomes a tale of adventure, physical and mental, which is evocative, meaningful and (the adjective that reviewers seem regularly forced to use in describing Seabright stories) haunting.*

Judgment Planet

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

INNES WATCHED the food package disappear down the crevasse. It seemed to fall slowly; his eyes followed it for a long time before it was lost in the greenish depths, and even after he could no longer see it, he thought he could still hear the noise of its fall. But in the first second of its loss it had been already as far beyond his reach as if it had been on the other side of his little world.

If his fingers hadn't been numb with cold — if he hadn't already been worried about his ability to get back to the ship with a wounded foot — if he hadn't found the notebook — if he hadn't read the article in *Antika* — if, if, if. They all led back to the first and final if: if he hadn't been born. If he hadn't been born, he wouldn't now be going to have to die.

For a moment he heard Bjornson's hateful voice in his ears. "*All* governments have to use force," the bureaucrat had said. "Don't be a fool. You almost worship Elean culture and art. But someday you'll find something that will make you realize that they too had to use violence. Naked force. It's the nature of governments."

He'd found what Bjornson had meant, hadn't he? The burial mounds. He'd come to Amorgos determined to prove the article in *Antika* wrong. But it had been right.

Had he *wanted* to lose the food package? Had he wanted to die? Oh, now, surely not: but . . . If he had had to drop something down the crevasse,

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why couldn't it have been the notebook? He'd hated the thing. But he'd dropped the food package, it had slipped and rolled, and before he could catch hold of it, it had gone plunging down into the hopeless depths. Had he *wanted?*

No more of that. He wouldn't even try to answer the question. It was overshadowed by a more urgent one: how long would it be before he could decently give up and let himself die?

He looked around the bleak horizon, sighing. He was already cold within his furs, and night was coming on. There wasn't a chance, there wasn't the faintest chance, that he'd be alive ten days from now. Getting back to the ship from his explorations on foot had been a little doubtful before, when all he had had as a handicap was the big cut across his heel (the fault of the notebook). Without food it was flatly impossible. Within ten days he'd be dead. But oh, the sickening, inexpressible bitterness of those ten days! Hopeless expedients, doomed stratagems, wild, floundering activity. Anxiety mounting in him, and guiltiness, as poisonous as arsenicals. His body would keep on with its blind trying. And in the end he'd be dead.

In the ship there were narcotics, things to make it easier. But if he were at the ship, he wouldn't be having to . . . It seemed to him that life had presented him with a succession of bitter pills to swallow. And this was the bitterest, most choking one yet.

Meantime, the first of the expedients. Night was coming on, and when the sun set the freezingly cold night wind would spring up. If he didn't want to die of exposure tonight, he'd have to find shelter from it.

The plain around him was as level as if it had been drawn against the sky with a straight-edge. There were no irregularities in it. The snow was too shallow for him to scoop out a shelter. But the light was bad, and he couldn't see far. There might be a burial tumulus up ahead.

Take cover for the night among a lot of dead men? Why not? He laughed. They were victims, as he was. And they were nothing but bones, had been nothing but bones for at least a millennium. They wouldn't be unkind.

He began to limp ahead rapidly, dragging his useless foot behind him, toward the sunset. It gave him a sort of pleasure that he was moving away from the ship. It was a slap in the face of that whore, hope. If he didn't find any tumulus, why, it was all right. He had his blaster when things got really bad.

His foot bothered him more than the ache of hunger in his belly. It felt numb and at the same time on fire. If he hadn't found the notebook, he wouldn't have hurt his foot on the shovel. . . . Had he *wanted* to die?

He had had bad luck. If he hadn't seen the article in *Antika* — and it was a magazine that dealt with popularized archeology, not a thing he usually

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read — he would never have petitioned the fuel controller for an allowance to come to Amorgos. Once here, of course, it had been inevitable that he would find the burial tumuli. Their long straight furrows, driven in an unwavering line across the flat plain, were unmistakable. But he might have been able to explain the bodies in them somehow.

But in the second tumulus he'd opened he'd found the notebook. That had been sheer bad luck, hadn't it? And the notebook, instead of having been kept on something ephemeral like the paptex of Innes' culture, which was gone within a decade, had been written on the fantastically durable Elean vellum. And in the demotic script, too, which anybody could read. Innes had had no trouble with it. After that, he hadn't been able to fool himself any longer. It was then that he had hurt his foot.

It was getting dark. The last streaks of red were gone from the sky. Despite the cold wind, Innes was no longer shivering. He had been walking rapidly, and inside his furs his body was covered with sweat. But he was getting tired. He had found no sign of shelter. When he stopped moving, the sweat, he supposed, would congeal. And then — But probably not tonight. People said that freezing was a very gentle way —

Oh, God. Oh, what a twinge. What had he done to his foot? It felt as if it were being pulled out by the roots.

He looked down. The plain was now quite dark. Had he struck his numb left foot on an invisible burial mound?

Oh, it did hurt so. For a moment he was quite sickened and dizzy with the pain. He bent over and stood gasping, trying to collect himself. Then he stooped and felt about in the snow with his hands.

No, no burial mound. But in the hard soil something of metal, about six inches high. He must have struck his useless foot on it.

He straightened. He felt resentful. He had all he could think about already, in his own disaster, and this discovery, whatever it was, did not represent a reprieve from it. Then he thought: You wanted something to make it easier. A distraction. And you are, or were, a man of science. Investigate this.

He stooped again and began clearing away the snow. It seemed softer here, as if it had drifted, and the work went easily. He took the shovel from his back and began scooping away snow and loose, gravelly earth. It was so dark that he had to keep feeling with his hands to check his progress.

The metal thing, whatever it was, kept turning out to be bigger than he had thought. There was a broad, rounded flange that stretched out and then sank away into the ground again. What amazed Innes was how easy it was to get the metal clear from the earth around it. The burial tumuli, for all their shallowness, had been shelled with earth frozen as hard as a rock.

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Here the work of clearing went on with the celerity of a dream.

The metal seemed to sink down deeply into the ground. Innes stood in a trench that he dug deeper and deeper. And still the metal drove on down through the curiously loose soil. Metal on Amorgos — how could that be? Amorgos was a death planet, a place where the recalcitrant, the argumentative, the out-of-step had been brought to die. There should be no metal here.

He had to stop to rest. He was panting; he laid back his fur hood and took deep breaths of the arctic air. He'd better slow down. If he kept on like this, he'd freeze his lungs. — It came to him, with a sense of shock, that it really didn't matter whether or not he froze them. But for a moment he had forgotten about all that.

If only he had a torch! He felt a passionate curiosity to see what he was uncovering. But the power charge had been used up yesterday; he'd thrown the exhausted thing away. Never mind, tomorrow he'd see what it was. He wouldn't freeze. He was sure he'd be alive tomorrow, now.

Tomorrow would be hungrier. He stood leaning on his shovel, feeling an odd blackness wash over him. There was a roaring in his ears. He didn't know where he was, or in whose body. Had he been dreaming? He was at home — he'd read an article in *Antika* — no, he was safe inside the ship — or lying out on the blank plain of Amorgos —

Then his head cleared. He thought, I've had a sort of fainting fit, blackout for a minute. No wonder. I've not had anything to eat all day, and my foot's pretty certainly infected. Anyone would be light-headed. . . .

Why wait for tomorrow? He'd be worse tomorrow. He took off his mitten and, wincing a little from the coldness of the metal, began feeling over the flange carefully.

The flange was about two feet wide. It ran in a cold, curving metallic band around a sort of diaphragm. And, though the flange was definitely metallic, the diaphragm seemed to be something else. It was not warm, but it was certainly less cold than the metal flange. Innes had the impression that it gave a little when he pressed on it.

A flange, two feet wide, running around a diaphragm some four feet in breadth, set slantwise in the earth. How long — how tall — the diaphragm was, he couldn't say. He had already uncovered some five feet of it.

What did that sound like? Innes sucked on his upper lip, noticing absently that though the lip was cold against his teeth it was salty with sweat. What did the diaphragm sound like? Well, of course the idea was absolutely impossible. But it did sound a little like a door.

A — He began shovelling. He worked in a sort of fury, tossing the loose dirt up over his shoulder, scraping, shovelling, gasping. He stopped to rest

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twice, grudging the seconds. And in the end he found that the flange bounded an ellipse some four feet by seven. It might, of course, be any number of things — a solar power device, a receptor for radio impulses, a signaling relay. But it seemed most like a door.

Innes hesitated. He was shaking with excitement and fatigue. Then he leaned forward and began to push, gently and then harder. The diaphragm seemed to bend. Then it gave.

He was inside an absolutely dark space, faintly warm, smelling of oil and machinery. The blackness was so complete it hurt his eyes. He turned toward the direction of the diaphragm, the trench, the outside world, and could see nothing. But before he had time to feel more than a first twinge of claustrophobia, a faint pearly light came on.

He was standing inside a big arched hall. There were couches around the sides, a basin that looked like a dry fountain in the center, and around the walls some sort of inlaid mural, richly colored and deep.

Typically Elean architecture. But here, on Amorgos? Innes was suddenly conscious of an intense fatigue. He'd fall over if he remained standing. He hobbled over to the nearest of the couches and sat down on it.

He was asleep almost before he leaned back. His fatigue had taken precedence of everything — curiosity, hunger, pain. He slept briefly and soundly, for perhaps half an hour. Then he was awake again, rested, with his foot hurting very much.

The faint pearly light still shone. He noticed now what had escaped him at first, that the couch on which he was sitting was covered with a puffy envelope of dust. It was, literally, over an inch thick. It was extremely fine, as it indeed must have been to seep into the hall past the almost hermetic seal of the diaphragm. So much dust on dustless, frozen Amorgos, must mean that a very long time had passed. The hall must be contemporary with the burial tumuli outside.

The hall, on Amorgos, was a riddle. The burial tumuli, unfortunately, weren't. Still . . . He got up from the couch and began to hobble around, looking up eagerly at the high, dim murals. If only the light weren't so bad! But he could see that they, like almost everything Elean, were of great beauty. How could people who could make murals like that be capable of a death planet?

The ache in his foot seemed to be like the ache of his hunger. The problem of shelter seemed to be solved for him, anyhow. He'd last a good deal longer in this warm, comfortable place than he would have lasted on the bleak outside. He wasn't sure he was grateful for it. He — He saw what he hadn't seen before, that under the most brilliantly colored of the murals, a thing that seemed to glow with flame, there was an opening in the wall. A corridor.

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He didn't know why he was so startled. It was reasonable to assume that this hall would not be the only apartment behind the diaphragm. All the same, he stood looking at the opening with his mouth agape and his heart pounding. Then he entered it.

The pearly light was no longer in evidence. After a moment a faint, faint glow appeared. But he had to grope his way forward by running his hands along the smooth walls. The corridor was not very broad; he could touch it on either side.

Abruptly the right wall fell away from his hand. He hunted it with his fingers; it had turned in a blunt angle. The left wall continued straight. He hesitated. Then he followed the wall to the right. He could explore the main corridor later.

He moved forward perhaps ten paces, his right hand on the wall, the other outstretched in front of him. The right wall fell away again, and he knew from the feel of the air that he was in a small room. If he only had his torch . . .

As if in answer to his wish, the pearly light, this time faintly bluish, appeared. He must have triggered some sort of photo-cell. (Still working, after ten centuries? But Elean building was singularly lasting; why not?) He was standing in a small room, perhaps some ten feet square. It looked like a storeroom. Around three sides something had been stacked up in a number of lumpy pyramids.

The objects in the pyramids seemed to be all the same size, but dust had settled over them so deeply that their contours and edges had been blurred; it was impossible to say what they were. Innes hobbled over to the nearest pyramid and picked up the topmost lump. His fingers sank an inch deep into feathery dust. He had somehow expected the object to be heavy, but it was light in his hand.

He shook and blew the clinging particles from it. It was a small, round tin. And on the side, written large in the demotic script, so that it was easy to read even in the blue light, the words: ALL PURPOSE FOOD.

Food. It couldn't be eatable, after so many centuries. And it couldn't be real, anyhow. Nobody had ever found a sign, a trace of any foodstuff in any Elean ruin. When the final catastrophe, whatever it was, had overwhelmed them, it had left their cities as bare of nourishment as if they had been swept. It must be an illusion, a dream. . . . And all the time Innes' mind was busy with these thoughts, his fingers were busily opening the tin.

The seal broke with a faint inrush of air. The All Purpose Food had been vacuum packed. A faint smell, not unappetizing, came to his nose. He lifted up the lid. A brownish, speckled surface met his eye. He scratched it with his fingernail. He tasted it.

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It wasn't bad. It had a faintly meaty agreeableness, though there were gritty particles in it that seemed like charcoal or carbonized sugar. It didn't taste in the least spoiled or unwholesome. Reassured, Innes crouched down on the floor and got out his knife. He dug out the contents of the tin and slowly chewed and swallowed them.

When he had finished, he was thirsty. But there was water in his flask, and there was plenty of snow outside. He drank.

He frowned. Abruptly he got to his feet and began taking tins from the pyramid. Five — nine — twenty — there must be a hundred in the stack. And every one from which he flew the dust bore the label: ALL PURPOSE FOOD.

He sampled at random from the other shelves. Tin after tin, all dust-covered and all, so far as he could see, perfectly sound. There were at least a thousand tins — more likely fifteen hundred — in the little room.

He shook his head as if to clear it. Now that his belly was full, the ache in his foot seemed to be less, and thinking should have been easier. It wasn't. Finding the food — all that food — had changed things so much he still couldn't grasp it. He was still incredulous in front of the big new fact: He didn't have to die.

Not any longer. It was really true. He wasn't under sentence of death any longer. He'd had a reprieve.

Smiling, he got the knapsack from his back and began stowing tins of All Purpose Food in it. Say five days at most to get back to the ship — a tin a day should be ample, but he'd take an extra five along to allow for emergencies — that would make ten tins. The tins weighed so little that the extra five would be no hindrance.

He'd note his position very carefully before starting, and he thought that despite the fuel controller's stinginess he had enough extra fuel to let him put the ship down beside the flanged diaphragm. Once he had the equipment in the ship available to use, he'd photograph, measure, weigh, describe, draw. He'd be able to spend the next six months, the next year, on a preliminary survey of his discovery. So far he'd seen only the big hall and the little storeroom, but there must be many more chambers along the corridor, waiting for him in the dark. He —

He paused, his fingers still holding one of the tins. Why should he go back to the ship?

Oh, of course he'd have to go back eventually. But his foot was highly painful, probably infected. Walking on it would certainly make it worse. Why shouldn't he stay here until his foot healed? He had plenty of food.

Plenty of food, and of course staying would be better for his foot. But the real reason — he felt like laughing — the real reason was that he

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couldn't bear to leave his discovery, even for five days. What he'd found behind the diaphragm ought to make his name rank with those of Schliemann and Evans, of Duncan and Blane. Innes, the man who'd shown that Amorgos was much more than a death planet, who'd found that it held other things than bones. (Not that his discovery would please the authorities especially. They wanted the past to be as . . . unkind as their present was. But archeology was relatively safe. He thought he could get a description of his discoveries into print.) He didn't want to go back to the ship now, and leave what he'd discovered. He wanted to hug it to himself.

Standing there, one hand suspended over his knapsack, he felt a return of the blackness he'd experienced on the bleak plain outside. It lasted only a minute. Yes, he'd stay.

He lost account of time. He ate when he was hungry, slept when fatigue forced his rest. His foot, when he looked at it, seemed better; he rarely looked at it. All his attention was focused outward, on the corridor and its galleries.

At first he had tried to keep up the attitude of a man devoted to scientific discipline. He'd tried to keep mental notes, to count his paces and turn them into feet, to estimate heights and distances. But the magnitude of what he was finding had first muted and then silenced his detached objectivity. It was replaced by wonder, by a passionate greediness. He wanted to see more . . . more. And there was always more.

He was curious as to causes, of course. What had been the purpose of these vast galleries, echoing hollowly to his dwarf footsteps, illuminated so feebly by the pearly or pale blue light? (The want of light was his greatest vexation. He could never see anything adequately. He struck matches, and they only augmented the dark.) Why had the noble painted faces been set high on the walls, to look down on him for a moment, as if in guardianship and greeting, before the tall dark swallowed them up? What had impelled Elea to bring the choicest of her art treasures — all Elean work was lovely, but he had never dreamed of anything like this — what had impelled Elea to bury these glories on desolate Amorgos? But most of the time curiosity was swallowed by wonder. There was so much, so much!

He felt a happy despair at all that lay before him. To have examined but one of the painted or inlaid friezes adequately would have taken him many months. He had no lights, he had no ladder. He was like a child wandering ignorant and delighted through the vastest of treasuries.

He managed to forget the notebook almost entirely.

The thought of it came to him at odd times — when he was waking from his light and somehow unsatisfactory slumber, when he was walking from

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one gallery to the next, when he ate. Phrases from it rang through his unwilling mind. "I find in myself a growing resistance and recalcitrance. . . . My actions alarm me. . . . My dreams are hideous. Are they responsible for my mental distress? . . . I have been told to report for scrutiny tomorrow. As a good citizen, I shall of course obey." And then the last entry, the one after which the pages of the notebook were blank. "I am to be exposed on Amorgos. I do not blame the authorities. Indeed, what else could they do? It is a disease, a plague, which threatens Elea's very existence. The exposure will not be painful. I am sure of that. The installations are good. We are a kind-hearted people. And I may of course survive the exposure. Some people do, and are cured. I keep telling myself that."

He hadn't, obviously, survived. Innes had found the notebook lying among his bones. But it was definite proof of what the article in *Antika* had only asserted dogmatically: that Elea had used methods as despotic in the repression of dissident opinion as anything in vogue in Innes' own day. Elean culture, with its beauty and freedom, had meant a lot to Innes. No wonder he wanted to forget about the entries in the notebook.

Most of the time he succeeded. But the riddle of Amorgos, which was the riddle of Elea, remained; and it was not the puzzling question of why the frescos had been painted, the galleries built, in this desolate place. It was a larger problem: how could a culture that put its malcontents out to die of exposure be capable of the most free and splendid works of art?

Six of the All Purpose Food tins had been emptied and stacked neatly on the floor of the little storeroom when Innes found the inscription in one of the galleries to the left.

It was the first inscription he had found in all his wanderings. It was set about half-way up the wall, more convenient to the eye than the painted or inlaid frescos usually were, but it was in the difficult, nearly impossible, "political" script.

Innes stared at it, almost panting with excitement. Here might be — here probably was — the answer to all his questions about Amorgos. And he could only make out a word or two — a date, "Amorgos," and the recurrent phrase, "infected with a plague." For the first time, he wished, wished passionately, that he had gone back to the ship. There was a monograph in his cabin — *Prolegomena to the Deciphering of Inscriptions in the so-called "Political" Script* — that would have been wonderfully helpful.

Well. The monograph was on the ship, the inscription was here. And if he could only read it, it would . . . He'd copy it. The light was bad here, the location of the writing inconvenient, and besides, the mere act of copying might clarify it for him.

He fumbled in his pocket for a notebook, something to write on. He got

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out *the* notebook, the one he had taken from the bones in the burial mound. In his excited state, he hardly noticed what it was. He turned to the back of the book, where the clean pages were, and began carefully tracing the flourishes of "political" with a stylus.

The copying was lengthy and difficult. His hands were shaking — he kept reversing flourishes — and the light was so bad that the characters of the inscription seemed to write and interchange before his eyes. But at last he had it all down. He checked it twice, and there were no mistakes.

He hobbled back to the hall of the couches and the fountain, the notebook open in his hand. By now he had gone so far in his exploration of the galleries that it took him a perceptible length of time to get back to the hall. But he never got lost.

He sat down on the nearest couch and began staring at the inscription. "In the year of Tertullo" — that would be about 1200 years ago — and then a long gap. Then the words, "a plague of" — of the will? the spirit? It was difficult to say precisely what the character meant — and then another gap.

His eyes were smarting and watering. The light in the hall of the couches was the best of anywhere behind the diaphragm, but it was none too good. He blinked and went on with his studies. Before he was so tired he had to sleep, he managed to decipher the last line. It was a variation of the usual closing of "political" inscriptions. The variation was probably significant. This time it read: "May the involuntary powers give them and us sweet life."

He slept and ate, ate and slept. Enigmatic phrases from the inscription swam through his dreams and troubled his sleep. He worked. His eyes pained constantly. And after he had slept for the fourth time, he had the inscription clear.

This is what it said:

"In the year of Tertullo, when Elea was united, prosperous, and at peace, a plague of the will came to us. Its victims showed their infection at first by their random and reasonless actions, and then by an inability to obey any rules, even the simplest. On the forty-third day after their infection they became delirious and died.

"Our physicians and doctors of the mind understand neither the cause of the disease nor its cure. We therefore, in an attempt to preserve those of us who are still sound, have brought those infected with the plague to Amorgos. May the future pity them and their distress. May our fellow citizens be restored to us and Elea be whole again. May the involuntary powers give them and us sweet life."

Innes closed the notebook. He felt an extraordinary happiness.

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Amorgos had been a death planet, yes. Here Elea had sent her sick, her dying, in a desperate quarantine. But she had sent them out prayerfully. In hope.

It had failed. The long burial tumuli bore mute witness. Elea had never recovered. But the article in *Antika* had been wrong. And Innes, in his stubborn refusal to believe, had been right.

He felt a sudden wave of the blackness. He tried to resist, to hold on to things. But it was stronger than it had ever been before. He could not stand against it. He was washed away.

He was cold. Cold seemed to be drilling into him, to be penetrating through layers of tissue into his bones. He was too cold to shiver. He ached with it.

He was weak. He breathed with effort, and consciously, and his heart seemed to beat only in response to his will. There was a hollow pool of weakness below his ribs.

And above these two realities, weakness and cold, there was the smell. It hovered nauseatingly and inescapably in the air.

With a great effort he raised his head. He had to blink the gum from his eyes. Where — ?

No, not in the ship. Not safe behind the diaphragm. He was lying on the bleak surface of Amorgos, against the iron-hard soil, in scanty snow. It was early morning; the sun cast long shadows against the white. He raised his head an inch farther and saw his foot, enormously swollen, breaking its coverings, lying twisted and limp. The nauseating smell was coming from it.

He sank back. Weakness for a moment drove out bewilderment. Then he thought: What is it? What has happened to me?

He had been safe and warm behind the diaphragm. He had just succeeded in translating a difficult inscription. He had fainted. He had wakened outside. Here. In the snow. Sick and weak, ready — but the idea was not frightening — ready to die. What did it mean? What had happened to him?

He had been behind the diaphragm. . . . No, wait. He gasped and blinked. Perhaps he had never been behind the diaphragm. Had the events of the last few days had any reality at all?

A dream? A vast, reasonable hallucination? But why should he have dreamed at all? He'd been stranded, without any food, condemned to death. And then he'd found the flange in the snow. But there had never been any flange.

He was so weak that getting the notebook from his pocket was like lifting a heavy load. And when he had pulled it out he lacked strength to open it and turn the pages. His heart muscles felt tired.

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At last he opened it. There was nothing in the back, as he had known there would not be; he had never copied an inscription. But there was an entry he wanted to see, the last one that had been made. He leafed to it.

He read it painfully, blinking — how dark it was getting, the sun must be going to set — and then lay back. He thought that at last he understood.

The flange, the diaphragm, the galleries, the food, the inscription, had been a vast delusion, a reasonable, organized dream. But the inscription he had thought he had read had told the truth, as dreams often do: a literal disease had attacked Elea, and she had sent the victims to Amorgos so that they might not infect others, in the hope that some of them would survive.

Was he quite sure? He wanted to believe in Elea's goodness. Could he be quite positive? Yes, for he had a double proof. The last entry in the notebook. What had happened to him.

"The exposure will not be painful," the unknown diarist had said. "I am sure of that. The installations are good. We are a kind-hearted people." And in that entry, the key words were: "*The installations are good.*"

Innes, when he had first read them, had misunderstood. "Installations" had meant to him what it would have meant in his own world — devices to chastise and correct, at the best some slight shelter against the elements.

But the installations? Innes had seen nothing like that on Amorgos. Of course not. Elea always concealed the machinery that powered her cities. The installation was inside. The whole planet *was* the installation.

And their purpose? To avoid — how simple it was, when you understood — to avoid letting the dying suffer mental and physical distress.

What else? They had been brought from Elea to Amorgos, the infected, the doomed-to-die. They had known they were going to die, that there was no cure. And the installations had been designed to make palatable the fact and experience of death.

That was what had happened to him. He had been condemned, from the moment he had dropped the food parcel. So the big hypnotic installations had done their work and woven a happy fantasy for him.

All, all a delusion. A skilful sugar-coating on the pill of death.

Innes had begun to smile faintly. But hadn't it been kind of them, to sugar-coat —? Yes, wonderfully good, wonderfully kind. Yes.

He had needed the conviction of their goodness. That was the fitting fantasy which the installations provided for him. And the fact that they did provide it was proof that the fantasy was truth.

When her very existence was threatened by plague, Elea could still remember to be merciful. A millennium had passed, and that mercy had still availed him. It was all right. Now he could get down, without too much retching, the last big bitter pill life would have for him, the pill of death.

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Philip Dick is at his best when dredging up the wrongness *that lies just below the placid exterior of our everyday living. And, as he marshals his array of terrifying facts he makes it very clear that their wrongness is in our eyes alone. The over-all picture of our existence makes excellent sense . . . to those interested parties whose primary concern is not with man.*

Expendable

by PHILIP K. DICK

THE MAN CAME out on the front porch and examined the day. Bright and cold — with dew on the lawns. He buttoned his coat and put his hands in his pockets.

As the man started down the steps the two caterpillars waiting by the mailbox twitched with interest.

"There he goes," the first one said. "Send in your report."

As the other began to rotate his vanes the man stopped, turning quickly.

"I heard that," he said. He brought his foot down against the wall, scraping the caterpillars off, onto the concrete. He crushed them.

Then he hurried down the path to the sidewalk. As he walked he looked around him. In the cherry tree a bird was hopping, pecking bright-eyed at the cherries. The man studied him. All right? Or — The bird flew off. Birds all right. No harm from them.

He went on. At the corner he brushed against a spider web, crossed from the bushes to the telephone pole. His heart pounded. He tore away, batting in the air. As he went on he glanced over his shoulder. The spider was coming slowly down the bush, feeling out the damage to his web.

Hard to tell about spiders. Difficult to figure out. More facts needed — No contact, yet.

He waited at the bus stop, stomping his feet to keep them warm.

The bus came and he boarded it, feeling a sudden pleasure as he took his seat with all the warm, silent people, staring indifferently ahead. A vague flow of security poured through him.

He grinned, and relaxed, the first time in days.

The bus went down the street.

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Tirmus waved his antennae excitedly.

"Vote, then, if you want." He hurried past them, up onto the mound. "But let me say what I said yesterday, before you start."

"We already know it all," Lala said impatiently. "Let's get moving. We have the plans worked out. What's holding us up?"

"More reason for me to speak." Tirmus gazed around at the assembled gods. "The entire Hill is ready to march against the giant in question. Why? We know he can't communicate to his fellows — It's out of the question. The type of vibration, the language they use makes it impossible to convey such ideas as he holds about us, about our —"

"Nonsense." Lala stepped up. "Giants communicate well enough."

"There is no record of a giant having made known information about us!"

The army moved restlessly.

"Go ahead," Tirmus said. "But it's a waste of effort. He's harmless — cut off. Why take all the time and —"

"Harmless?" Lala stared at him. "Don't you understand? He knows!"

Tirmus walked away from the mound. "I'm against unnecessary violence. We should save our strength. Someday we'll need it."

The vote was taken. As expected, the army was in favor of moving against the giant. Tirmus sighed and began stroking out the plans on the ground.

"This is the location that he takes. He can be expected to appear there at period-end. Now, as I see the situation —"

He went on, laying out the plans in the soft soil.

One of the gods leaned toward another, antennae touching. "This giant. He doesn't stand a chance. In a way, I feel sorry for him. How'd he happen to butt in?"

"Accident." The other grinned. "You know, the way they do, barging around."

"It's too bad for him, though."

It was nightfall. The street was dark and deserted. Along the sidewalk the man came, a newspaper under his arm. He walked quickly, glancing around him. He skirted the big tree growing by the curb and leaped agilely into the street. He crossed the street and gained the opposite side. As he turned the corner he entered the web, sewn from bush to telephone pole. Automatically he fought it, brushing it off him. As the strands broke a thin humming came to him, metallic and wiry.

". . . wait!"

He paused.

". . . careful . . . inside . . . wait. . . ."

His jaw set. The last strands broke in his hands and he walked on. Behind

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him the spider moved in the fragment of his web, watching. The man looked back.

"Nuts to you," he said. "I'm not taking any chances, standing there all tied up."

He went on, along the sidewalk, to his path. He skipped up the path, avoiding the darkening bushes. On the porch he found his key, fitting it into the lock.

He paused. Inside? Better than outside, especially at night. Night a bad time. Too much movement under the bushes. Not good. He opened the door and stepped inside. The rug lay ahead of him, a pool of blackness. Across on the other side he made out the form of the lamp.

Four steps to the lamp. His foot came up. He stopped.

What did the spider say? Wait? He waited, listening. Silence.

He took his cigarette lighter and flicked it on.

The carpet of ants swelled toward him, rising up in a flood. He leaped aside, out onto the porch. The ants came rushing, hurrying, scratching across the floor in the half-light.

The man jumped down to the ground and around the side of the house. When the first ants came flowing over the porch he was already spinning the faucet handle rapidly, gathering up the hose.

The burst of water lifted the ants up and scattered them, flinging them away. The man adjusted the nozzle, squinting through the mist. He advanced, turning the hard stream from side to side.

"God damn you," he said, his teeth locked. "Waiting inside —"

He was frightened. Inside — never before! In the night cold sweat came out on his face. Inside. They had never got inside before. Maybe a moth or two, and flies, of course. But they were harmless, fluttery, noisy —

A carpet of ants!

Savagely, he sprayed them until they broke rank and fled into the lawn, into the bushes, under the house.

He sat down on the walk, holding the hose, trembling from head to foot.

They really meant it. Not an anger raid, annoyed, spasmodic; but planned, an attack, worked out. They had waited for him. One more step —

Thank God for the spider.

Presently he shut the hose off and stood up. No sound; silence everywhere. The bushes rustled suddenly. Beetle? Something black scurried — he put his foot on it. A messenger, probably. Fast runner. He went gingerly inside the dark house, feeling his way by the cigarette lighter.

Later, he sat at his desk, the spray gun beside him, heavy-duty steel and copper. He touched its damp surface with his fingers.

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Seven o'clock. Behind him the radio played softly. He reached over and moved the desk lamp so that it shone on the floor beside the desk.

He lit a cigarette and took some writing paper and his fountain pen. He paused, thinking.

So they really wanted him, badly enough to plan it out. Bleak despair descended over him like a torrent. What could he do? Whom could he go to? Or tell? He clenched his fists, sitting bolt upright in the chair.

The spider slid down beside him onto the desk top. "Sorry. Hope you aren't frightened, as in the poem."

The man stared. "Are you the same one? The one at the corner? The one who warned me?"

"No. That's somebody else. A Spinner. I'm strictly a Cruncher. Look at my jaws." He opened and shut his mouth. "I bite them up."

The man smiled. "Good for you."

"Sure. Do you know how many there are of us in — say — an acre of land? Guess."

"A thousand."

"No. Two and a half million. Of all kinds. Crunchers, like me, or Spinners, or Stingers."

"Stingers?"

"The best. Let's see." The spider thought. "For instance, the black widow, as you call her. Very valuable." He paused. "Just one thing."

"What's that?"

"We have our problems. The gods —"

"Gods!"

"Ants, as you call them. The leaders. They're beyond us. Very unfortunate. They have an awful taste — makes one sick. We have to leave them for the birds."

The man stood up. "Birds? Are they —"

"Well, we have an arrangement. This has been going on for ages. I'll give you the story. We have some time left."

The man's heart contracted. "Time left? What do you mean?"

"Nothing. A little trouble later on, I understand. Let me give you the background. I don't think you know it."

"Go ahead. I'm listening." He stood up and began to walk back and forth.

"*They* were running the earth pretty well, about a billion years ago. You see, men came from some other planet. Which one? I don't know. They landed and found the earth quite well cultivated by them. There was a war."

"So we're the invaders," the man murmured.

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"Sure. The war reduced both sides to barbarism, them and yourselves. You forgot how to attack, and they degenerated into closed social factions, ants, termites —"

"I see."

"The last group of you that knew the full story started us going. We were bred —" the spider chuckled in its own fashion, "bred someplace for this worthwhile purpose! We keep them down very well. You know what they call us? The Eaters. Unpleasant, isn't it?"

Two more spiders came drifting down on their web-strands, alighting on the desk. The three spiders went into a huddle.

"More serious than I thought," the Cruncher said easily. "Didn't know the whole dope. This Stinger here —"

The black widow came to the edge of the desk. "Giant," she piped, metallically. "I'd like to talk with you."

"Go ahead," the man said.

"There's going to be some trouble here. They're moving, coming here, a lot of them. We thought we'd stay with you awhile. Get in on it."

"I see." The man nodded. He licked his lips, running his fingers shakily through his hair. "Do you think — that is, what are the chances —"

"Chances?" The Stinger undulated thoughtfully. "Well, we've been in this work a long time. Almost a million years. I think that we have the edge over them, in spite of drawbacks. Our arrangements with the birds, and of course, with the toads —"

"I think we can save you," the Cruncher put in cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, we look forward to events like this."

From under the floor boards came a distant scratching sound, the noise of a multitude of tiny claws and wings, vibrating faintly, remotely. The man heard. His body sagged all over.

"You're really certain? You think you can do it?" He wiped the perspiration from his lips and picked up the spray gun, still listening.

The sound was growing, swelling beneath them, under the floor, under their feet. Outside the house bushes rustled and a few moths flew up against the window. Louder and louder the sound grew, beyond and below, everywhere, a rising hum of anger and determination. The man looked from side to side.

"You're sure you can do it?" he murmured. "You really can save me?"

"Oh," the Stinger said, embarrassed. "I didn't mean *that*. I meant the species, the race . . . not you as an individual."

The man gaped at him and the three Eaters shifted uneasily. More moths burst against the window. Under them the floor stirred and heaved.

"I see," the man said. "I'm sorry I misunderstood you."

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What if . . . *is the title of a most agreeable fantasy by the usually scientific Isaac Asimov; and it is also, in two syllables, the recipe for writing delightful improbabilities. "What if," for instance, a demon of the remote past achieved his magic by time-thievery (chronoklepticism) of the inventions of modern science? Add a likable young couple whose fortunes are imperiled by this device, a lively sense of logical humor, and another ingenious "what if" reserved for a final surprise, and you have a freshly charming story to prove that Robert Sheckley, hitherto noted chiefly for science fiction, is no mean hand at whipping up the deftest of light fantasy.*

The King's Wishes

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

AFTER SQUATTING behind a glassware display for almost two hours, Bob Granger felt his legs begin to cramp. He moved to ease them, and his number ten iron slipped off his lap, clattering on the floor.

"Shh," Janice whispered, her mashie gripped tightly.

"I don't think he's going to come," Bob said.

"Be quiet, honey," Janice whispered again, peering into the darkness of their store.

There was no sign of the burglar yet. He had come every night in the past week, mysteriously removing generators, refrigerators and air-conditioners. Mysteriously — for he tampered with no locks, jimmied no windows, left no footprints. Yet somehow, he was able to sneak in, time after time, and slink out with a good part of their stock.

"I don't think this was such a good idea," Bob whispered. "After all, a man capable of carrying several hundred pounds of generator on his back —"

"We'll handle him," Janice said, with the certainty that had made her a master sergeant in the WAC Motor Corps. "Besides, we have to stop him — he's postponing our wedding day."

Bob nodded in the darkness. He and Janice had built and stocked the Country Department Store with their army savings. They were planning on getting married, as soon as the profits enabled them to. But when someone stole refrigerators and air-conditioners —

"I think I hear something," Janice said, shifting her grip on the mashie.

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There was a faint noise somewhere in the store. They waited. Then they heard the sound of feet, padding over the linoleum.

"When he gets to the middle of the floor," Janice whispered, "switch on the lights."

Finally they were able to make out a blackness against the lesser blackness of the store. Bob switched on the lights, shouting, "Hold it there!"

"Oh, no!" Janice gasped, almost dropping her mashie. Bob turned and gulped.

Standing in front of them was a being at least ten feet tall. He had budding horns on his forehead, and tiny wings on his back. He was dressed in a pair of dungarees and a white sweatshirt with EBLIS TECH written across it in scarlet letters. Scuffed white buckskins were on his tremendous feet, and he had a blond crewcut.

"Damn," he said, looking at Bob and Janice. "Knew I should have taken Invisibility in college." He wrapped his arms around his stomach and puffed out his cheeks. Instantly his legs disappeared. Puffing out his cheeks still more, he was able to make his stomach vanish. But that was as far as it went.

"Can't do it," he said, releasing his stored-up air. His stomach and legs came back into visibility. "Haven't got the knack. Damn."

"What do you want?" Janice asked, drawing herself to her full slender five foot three.

"Want? Let me see. Oh yes. The fan." He walked across the room and picked up a large floor fan.

"Just a minute," Bob shouted. He walked up to the giant, his golf club poised. Janice followed close behind him. "Where do you think you're going with that?"

"To King Alerian," the giant said. "He wished for it."

"Oh, he did, did he?" Janice said. "Better put it down." She poised the mashie over her shoulder.

"But I *can't*," the young giant said, his tiny wings twitching nervously. "It's been wished for."

"You asked for it," Janice said. Although small, she was in fine condition from the WACs, where she had spent her time repairing jeep engines. Now, blond hair flying, she swung her club.

"Ouch!" she said. The mashie bounced off the being's head, almost knocking Janice over with the recoil. At the same time, Bob swung his club at the giant's ribs.

It passed *through* the giant, ricocheting against the floor.

"Force is useless against a ferra," the young giant said apologetically.

"A what?" Bob asked.

"A ferra. We're first cousins of the jinn, and related by marriage to the

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devas." He started to walk back to the center of the room, the fan gripped in one broad hand. "Now if you'll excuse me —"

"A demon?" Janice stood, open-mouthed. Her parents had allowed no talk of ghosts or demons in the house, and Janice had grown up a hardheaded realist. She was skilled at repairing anything mechanical; that was her part of the partnership. But anything more fanciful she left to Bob.

Bob, having been raised on a liberal feeding of Oz and Burroughs, was more credulous. "You mean you're out of the Arabian Nights?" he asked.

"Oh, no," the ferra said. "The jinn of Arabia are my cousins, as I said. All demons are related, but I am a ferra, of the ferras."

"Would you mind telling me," Bob asked, "What you are doing with my generator, my air-conditioner, and my refrigerator?"

"I'd be glad to," the ferra said, putting down the fan. He felt around the air, found what he wanted, and sat down on nothingness. Then he crossed his legs and tightened the laces of one buckskin.

"I graduated from Eblis Tech just about three weeks ago," he began. "And of course, I applied for civil service. I come from a long line of government men. Well, the lists were crowded, as they always are, so I —"

"Civil service?" Bob asked.

"Oh, yes. They're all civil service jobs — even the jinni in Aladdin's lamp was a government man. You have to pass the tests, you know."

"Go on," Bob said.

"Well — promise this won't go any farther — I got my job through pull." He blushed orange. "My father is a ferra in the Underworld Council, so he used his influence. I was appointed, over 4,000 higher-ranking ferras, to the position of ferra of the King's Cup. That's quite an honor, you know."

There was a short silence. Then the ferra went on.

"I must confess I wasn't ready," he said sadly. "The ferra of the cup has to be skilled in all branches of demonology. I had just graduated from college — with only passing grades. But of course, I thought I could handle anything."

The ferra paused, and rearranged his body more comfortably on the air.

"But I don't want to bother you with my troubles," he said, getting off the air and standing on the floor. "If you'll excuse me —" He picked up the fan.

"Just a minute," Janice said. "Has this king commanded you to get our fan?"

"In a way," the ferra said, turning orange again.

"Well, look," Janice said. "Is this king rich?" She had decided, for the moment, to treat this superstitious entity as a real person.

"He's a very wealthy monarch."

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"Then why can't he buy this stuff?" Janice wanted to know. "Why does he have to steal it?"

"Well," the ferra mumbled, "There's no place where he can buy it."

"One of those backward Oriental countries," Janice said, half to herself. "Why can't he import the goods? Any company would be glad to arrange it."

"This is all very embarrassing," the ferra said, rubbing one buckskin against another. "I wish I could make myself invisible."

"Out with it," Bob said.

"If you must know," the ferra said sullenly, "King Alerian lives in what you would call 2,000 B.C."

"Then how —"

"Oh, just a minute," the young ferra said crossly. "I'll explain everything." He rubbed his perspiring hands on his sweatshirt.

"As I told you, I got the job of ferra of the king's cup. Naturally, I expected the king would ask for jewels or beautiful women, either of which I could have supplied easily. We learn that in first term conjuration. But the king had all the jewels he wanted, and more wives than he knew what to do with. So what does he do but say, 'Ferra, my palace is hot in the summer. Do that which will make my palace cool.'

"I knew right then I was in over my head. It takes an advanced ferra to handle climate. I guess I had spent too much time on the track team. I was stuck.

"I hurried to the Master Encyclopedia and looked up Climate. The spells were just too much for me. And of course, I couldn't ask for help. That would have been an admission of incompetence. But I read that there was artificial climate-control in the Twentieth Century. So I walked here, along the narrow trail to the future, and took one of your air-conditioners. When the king wanted me to stop his food from spoiling, I came back for a refrigerator. Then it was —"

"You hooked them all to the generator?" Janice asked, interested in such details.

"Yes. I may not be much with spells, but I'm pretty handy mechanically."

It made sense, Bob thought. After all, who could keep a palace cool in 2,000 B.C.? Not all the money in the world could buy the gust of icy air from an air-conditioner, or the food-saving qualities of a refrigerator. But what still bothered Bob was, what kind of a demon was he? He didn't look Assyrian. Certainly not Egyptian . . .

"No, I don't get it," Janice said. "In the *past*? You mean time travel?"

"Sure. I majored in time travel," the ferra said, with a proud, boyish grin.

Aztec perhaps, Bob thought, although that seemed unlikely. . . .

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"Well," Janice said, "why don't you go somewhere else? Why not steal from one of the big department stores?"

"This is the only place the trail to the future leads," the ferra said.

He picked up the fan. "I'm sorry to be doing this, but if I don't make good here, I'll never get another appointment. It'll be limbo for me."

He disappeared.

Half an hour later, Bob and Janice were in a corner booth of an all-night diner, drinking black coffee and talking in low tones.

"I don't believe a word of it," Janice was saying, all her skepticism back in force. "Demons! Ferras!"

"You have to believe it," Bob said wearily. "You saw it."

"I don't have to believe everything I see," Janice said stanchly. Then she thought of the missing articles, the vanishing profits and the increasingly distant marriage. "All right," she said. "Oh, honey, what'll we do?"

"You have to fight magic with magic," Bob said confidently. "He'll be back tomorrow night. We'll be ready for him."

"I'm in favor of that," Janice said. "I know where we can borrow a 30-30 —"

Bob shook his head. "Bullets will just bounce off him, or pass through. Good, strong magic, that's what we need. A dose of his own medicine."

"What kind of magic?" Janice asked.

"To play safe," Bob said, "We'd better use all kinds. I wish I knew where he's from. To be really effective, magic —"

"You want more coffee?" the counterman said, appearing suddenly in front of them.

Bob looked up guiltily. Janice blushed.

"Let's go," she said to Bob. "If anyone hears us, we'll be laughed out of town."

They met at the store that evening. Bob had spent the day at the library, gathering his materials. They consisted of 25 sheets covered on both sides with Bob's scrawling script.

"I still wish we had that 30-30," Janice said, picking up a tire iron from the hardware section.

At 11:45 the ferra appeared.

"Hi," he said. "Where do you keep your electric heaters? The king wants something for winter. He's tired of open hearths. Too drafty."

"Begone," Bob said, "in the name of the cross!" He held up a cross.

"Sorry," the ferra said pleasantly. "The ferras aren't connected with Christianity."

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"Begone in the name of Namtar and Idpa!" Bob went on, since Mesopotamia was first on his notes. "In the name of Utuq, dweller of the desert, in the name of Telal and Alal —"

"Oh, here they are," the ferra said. "Why do I get myself into these jams? This is the electric model, isn't it? Looks a little shoddy."

"I invoke Rata, the boatbuilder," Bob intoned, switching to Polynesia. "And Hina, the tapa maker."

"Shoddy nothing," Janice said, her business instincts getting the better of her. "That stove is guaranteed for a year. Unconditionally."

"I call on the Heavenly Wolf," Bob went on, moving into China when Polynesia had no affect. "The Wolf who guards the gates of Shang Ti. I invoke the thunder god, Lei Kung —"

"Let's see, I have an infrared broiler," the ferra said. "And I need a bathtub. Have you got a bathtub?"

"I call Bael, Buer, Forcas, Marchocias, Astaroth —"

"These are bathtubs, aren't they?" the ferra asked Janice, who nodded involuntarily. "I think I'll take the largest. The king is a good-sized man."

"— Behemoth, Theutus, Asmodeus and Incubus!" Bob finished. The ferra looked at him with respect.

Angrily Bob invoked Ormazd, Persian king of light, and then the Ammonitic Beelphegor, and Dagon of the ancient Philistines.

"That's all I can carry, I suppose," the ferra said.

Bob invoked Damballa. He called upon the gods of Haiti. He tried Thessalian magic, and spells from Asia Minor. He nudged Aztec gods and stirred Mayan spirits. He tried Africa, Madagascar, India, Ireland, Malaya, Scandinavia and Japan.

"That's impressive," the ferra said, "but it'll really do no good." He lifted the bathtub, broiler and heater.

"Why not?" Bob gasped, out of breath.

"You see, ferras are affected only by their own indigenous spells. Just as Jinn are responsible only to the magic laws of Arabia. Also, you don't know my true name, and I assure you, you can't do much of a job of exorcizing anything if you don't know its true name."

"What country are you from?" Bob asked, wiping perspiration from his forehead.

"Sorry," the ferra said. "But if you knew that, you might find the right spell to use against me. And I'm in enough trouble as it is."

"Now look," Janice said. "If the king is so rich, why can't he pay?"

"The king never pays for anything he can get free," the ferra said. "That's why he's so rich."

Bob and Janice glared at him, their marriage fading off into the future.

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"See you tomorrow night," the ferra said.

He waved a friendly hand, and vanished.

"Well now," Janice said, after the ferra had left. "What now? Any more bright ideas?"

"All out of them," Bob said, sitting down heavily on a sofa.

"Any more magic?" Janice asked, with a faint touch of irony.

"That won't work," Bob said. "I couldn't find *ferra* or *King Alerian* listed in any encyclopedia. He's probably from some place we'd never hear of. A little native state in India, perhaps."

"Just our luck," Janice said, abandoning irony. "What are we going to do? I suppose he'll want a vacuum cleaner next, and then a phonograph." She closed her eyes and concentrated.

"He really is trying to make good," Bob said.

"I think I have an idea," Janice said, opening her eyes.

"What's that?"

"First of all, it's *our* business that's important, and *our* marriage. Right?"

"Right," Bob said.

"All right. I don't know much about spells," Janice said, rolling up her sleeves, "But I do know machines. Let's get to work."

The next night the ferra visited them at a quarter to 11. He wore the same white sweater, but he had exchanged his buckskins for tan loafers.

"The king is in a special rush for this," he said. "His newest wife has been pestering the life out of him. It seems that her clothes last for only one washing. Her slaves beat them with rocks."

"Sure," Bob said.

"Help yourself," Janice said.

"That's awfully decent of you," the ferra said gratefully. "I really appreciate it." He picked up a washing machine. "She's waiting now."

He vanished.

Bob offered Janice a cigarette. They sat down on a couch and waited. In half an hour the ferra appeared again.

"What did you do?" he asked.

"Why, what's the matter?" Janice asked sweetly.

"The washer! When the queen started it, it threw out a great cloud of evil-smelling smoke. Then it made some strange noises and stopped."

"In our language," Janice said, blowing a smoke ring, "we would say it was gimmicked."

"Gimmicked?"

"Rigged. Fixed. Strung. And so's everything else in this place."

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"But you can't do that!" the ferra said. "It's not playing the game."

"You're so smart," Janice said venomously, "Go ahead and fix it."

"I was boasting," the ferra said in a small voice. "I was much better at sports."

Janice smiled and yawned.

"Well, gee," the ferra said, his little wings twitching nervously.

"Sorry," Bob said.

"This puts me in an awful spot," the ferra said. "I'll be demoted. I'll be thrown out of civil service."

"We can't let ourselves go bankrupt, can we?" Janice asked.

Bob thought for a moment. "Look," he said. "Why don't you tell the king you've met a strong countermagic? Tell him he has to pay a tariff to the demons of the underworld if he wants his stuff."

"He won't like it," the ferra said doubtfully.

"Try it anyhow," Bob suggested.

"I'll try," the ferra said, and vanished.

"How much do you think we can charge?" Janice asked.

"Oh, give him standard rates. After all, we've built this store on fair practices. We wouldn't want to discriminate. I still wish I knew where he was from, though."

"He's so rich," Janice said dreamily. "It seems a shame not to —"

"Wait a minute!" Bob shouted. "We can't do it! How can there be refrigerators in 2,000 before Christ? Or air-conditioners?"

"What do you mean?"

"It would change the whole course of history!" Bob said. "Some smart guy is going to look at those things and figure out how they work. Then the whole course of history will be changed!"

"So what?" Janice asked practically.

"So what? So research will be carried out along different lines. The present will be changed."

"You mean it's impossible?"

"Yes!"

"That's just what I've been saying all along," Janice said triumphantly.

"Oh, stop that," Bob said. "I wish I could figure this out. No matter what country the ferra is from, it's bound to have an effect on the future. We can't chance a paradox."

"Why not?" Janice asked, but at that moment the ferra appeared.

"The king has agreed," the ferra said. "Will this pay for what I've taken?" He held out a small sack.

Spilling out the sack, Bob found that it contained about two dozen large rubies, emeralds and diamonds.

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"We can't take it," Bob said. "We can't do business with you."

"Don't be superstitious!" Janice shouted, seeing their marriage begin to evaporate again.

"Why not?" the ferra asked.

"We can't introduce modern things into the past," Bob said. "It'll change the present. This world may vanish or something."

"Oh, don't worry about that," the ferra said. "I guarantee nothing will happen."

"But why? I mean, if you introduced a washer in ancient Rome —"

"Unfortunately," the ferra said, "King Alerian's kingdom has no future."

"Would you explain that?"

"Sure." The ferra sat down on the air. "In three years King Alerian and his country will be completely and irrevocably destroyed by forces of nature. Not a person will be saved. Not even a piece of pottery."

"Fine," Janice said, holding a ruby to the light. "We'd better unload while he's still in business."

"I guess that takes care of that," Bob said. Their business was saved, and their marriage was in the immediate future. "How about you?" he asked the ferra.

"Well, I've done rather well on this job," the ferra said. "I think I'll apply for a foreign transfer. I hear there are some wonderful opportunities in Arabian sorcery."

He ran a hand complacently over his blond crewcut. "I'll be seeing you," he said, and started to disappear.

"Just a minute," Bob said. "Would you mind telling me what country you're from? And what country King Alerian is from?"

"Oh, sure," the ferra said, only his head still visible. "I thought you knew. Ferras are the demons of Atlantis."

And he disappeared.

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That kindly and sentimental gentleman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, once described the thoughts of children as being "long, long thoughts" and the will of a child as being "as the wind wills." Of course, the poet was thinking of such well-ordered moppets as those in The Children's Hour, *but we feel his lines fit equally well the curiously thoughtful boys and girls discussed by the* unsentimental *Mr. Bester.*

Star Light, Star Bright

by ALFRED BESTER

THE MAN in the car was 38 years old. He was tall, slender, and not strong. His cropped hair was prematurely gray. He was afflicted with an education and a sense of humor. He was inspired by a purpose. He was armed with a phone book. He was doomed.

He drove up Post Avenue, stopped at No. 17 and parked. He consulted the phone book, then got out of the car and entered the house. He examined the postboxes and then ran up the stairs to apartment 2-F. He rang the bell. While he waited for an answer he got out a small black notebook and a superior silver pencil that wrote in four colors.

The door opened. To a nondescript middle-aged lady, the man said: "Good evening. Mrs. Buchanan?"

The lady nodded.

"My name is Foster. I'm from the Science Institute. We're trying to check some flying saucer reports. I won't take a minute." Mr. Foster insinuated himself into the apartment. He had been in so many that he knew the layout automatically. He marched briskly down the hall to the front parlor, turned, smiled at Mrs. Buchanan, opened the notebook to a blank page and poised the pencil.

"Have you ever seen a flying saucer, Mrs. Buchanan?"

"No. And it's a lot of bunk. I —"

"Have your children ever seen them? You do have children?"

"Yeah, but they —"

"How many?"

"Two. Them flying saucers never —"

"Are either of school age?"

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"What?"

"School," Mr. Foster repeated impatiently. "Do they go to school?"

"The boy's 28," Mrs. Buchanan said. "The girl's twenty-four. They finished school a long —"

"I see. Either of them married?"

"No. About them flying saucers, you scientist doctors ought to —"

"We are," Mr. Foster interrupted. He made a tick-tack-toe in the notebook, then closed it and slid it into an inside pocket with the superior pencil. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Buchanan," he said, turned, and marched out.

Downstairs, Mr. Foster got into the car, opened the telephone directory, turned to a page and ran his pencil through a name. He examined the name underneath, memorized the address and started the car. He drove to Fort George Avenue and stopped the car in front of No. 800. He entered the house and took the self-service elevator to the fourth floor. He rang the bell of apartment 4-G. While he waited for an answer he got out the small black notebook and the superior pencil.

The door opened. To a truculent man, Mr. Foster said, "Good evening. Mr. Buchanan?"

"What about it?" the truculent man said.

Mr. Foster said, "My name is Davis. I'm from the Association of National Broadcasters. We're preparing a list of names for prize competitors. May I come in? Won't take a minute."

Mr. Foster/Davis insinuated himself and presently consulted with Mr. Buchanan and his red-headed wife in the living room of their apartment.

"Have you ever won a prize on radio or television?"

"No," Mr. Buchanan said angrily. "We never got a chance. Everybody else does but not us."

"All that free money and iceboxes," Mrs. Buchanan said. "Trips to Paris and planes and —"

"That's why we're making up this list," Mr. Foster/Davis broke in. "Have any of your relatives won prizes?"

"No. It's all a fix. Put-up jobs. They —"

"Any of your children?"

"Ain't got any children."

"I see. Thank you very much." Mr. Foster/Davis played out the tick-tack-toe game in his notebook, closed it and put it away. He released himself from the indignation of the Buchanans, went down to his car, crossed out another name in the phone book, memorized the address of the name underneath and started the car.

He drove to No. 1215 East 68th Street and parked in front of a private

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brownstone house. He rang the doorbell and was confronted by a maid in uniform.

"Good evening," he said. "Is Mr. Buchanan in?"

"Who's calling?"

"My name is Hook," Mr. Foster/Davis said. "I'm conducting an investigation for the Better Business Bureau."

The maid disappeared, reappeared and conducted Mr. Foster/Davis/Hook to a small library where a resolute gentleman in dinner clothes stood holding a Limoges demitasse cup and saucer. There were expensive books on the shelves. There was an expensive fire in the grate.

"Mr. Hook?"

"Yes, sir," the doomed man replied. He did not take out the notebook. "I won't be a minute, Mr. Buchanan. Just a few questions."

"I have great faith in the Better Business Bureau," Mr. Buchanan pronounced. "Our bulwark against the inroads of —"

"Thank you, sir," Mr. Foster/Davis/Hook interrupted. "Have you ever been criminally defrauded by a business man?"

"The attempt has been made. I have never succumbed.'

"And your children? You do have children?"

"My son is hardly old enough to qualify as a victim."

"How old is he, Mr. Buchanan?"

"Ten."

"Perhaps he has been tricked at school? There are crooks who specialize in victimizing children."

"Not at my son's school. He is well protected."

"What school is that, sir?"

"Germanson."

"One of the best. Did he ever attend a city public school?"

"Never."

The doomed man took out the notebook and the superior pencil. This time he made a serious entry.

"Any other children, Mr. Buchanan?"

"A daughter. Seventeen."

Mr. Foster/Davis/Hook considered, started to write, changed his mind and closed the notebook. He thanked his host politely and escaped from the house before Mr. Buchanan could ask for his credentials. He was ushered out by the maid, ran down the stoop to his car, opened the door, entered and was felled by a tremendous blow on the side of his head.

When the doomed man awoke, he thought he was in bed suffering from a hangover. He started to crawl to the bathroom when he realized he was

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dumped in a chair like a suit for the cleaners. He opened his eyes. He was in what appeared to be an underwater grotto. He blinked frantically. The water receded.

He was in a small legal office. A stout man who looked like an unfrocked Santa Claus stood before him. To one side, seated on a desk and swinging his legs carelessly, was a thin young man with a lantern jaw and eyes closely set on either side of his nose.

"Can you hear me?" the stout man asked.

The doomed man grunted.

"Can we talk?"

Another grunt.

"Joe," the stout man said pleasantly, "a towel."

The thin young man slipped off the desk, went to a corner basin and soaked a white hand towel. He shook it once, sauntered back to the chair where, with the suddeness and savagery of a tiger, he lashed it across the sick man's face.

"For God's sake!" Mr. Foster/Davis/Hook cried.

"That's better," the stout man said. "My name's Herod. Walter Herod, attorney-at-law." He stepped to the desk where the contents of the doomed man's pockets were spread, picked up a wallet and displayed it. "Your name is Warbeck. Marion Perkin Warbeck. Right?"

The doomed man gazed at his wallet, then at Walter Herod, attorney-at-law, and finally admitted the truth. "Yes," he said. "My name is Warbeck. But I never admit the Marion to strangers."

He was again lashed by the wet towel and fell back in the chair, stung and bewildered.

"That will do, Joe," Herod said. "Not again, please, until I tell you." To Warbeck he said, "Why this interest in the Buchanans?" He waited for an answer, then continued pleasantly, "Joe's been tailing you. You've averaged five Buchanans a night. Thirty so far. What's your angle?"

"What the hell is this? Russia?" Warbeck demanded indignantly. "You've got no right to kidnap me and grill me like the MVD. If you think you can —"

"Joe," Herod interrupted pleasantly. "Again, please."

Again the towel lashed Warbeck. Tormented, furious and helpless, he burst into tears.

Herod fingered the wallet casually. "Your papers say you're a teacher by profession, principal of a public school. I thought teachers were supposed to be legit. How did you get mixed up in the inheritance racket?"

"The what racket?" Warbeck asked faintly.

"The inheritance racket," Herod repeated patiently. "The Heirs of

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Buchanan routine. What kind of parlay are you using? Personal approach?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Warbeck answered. He sat bolt upright and pointed to the thin youth. "And don't start that towel business again."

"I'll start what I please and when I please," Herod said ferociously. "And I'll finish you when I Goddamned well please. You're stepping on my toes and I don't buy it. I've got 75,000 a year I'm taking out of this and I'm not going to let you chisel."

There was a long pause, significant for everybody in the room except the doomed man. Finally he spoke. "I'm an educated man," he said slowly. "Mention Galileo, say, or the lesser Cavalier poets, and I'm right up there with you. But there are gaps in my education, and this is one of them. I can't meet the situation. Too many unknowns."

"I told you my name," Herod answered. He pointed to the thin young man. "That's Joe Davenport."

Warbeck shook his head. "Unknown in the mathematical sense. X quantities. Solving equations. My education speaking."

Joe looked startled. "Jesus," he said without moving his lips. "Maybe he is legit."

Herod examined Warbeck curiously. "I'm going to spell it out for you," he said. "The inheritance racket is a long-term con. It operates something like so: There's a story that James Buchanan —"

"Fifteenth President of the U. S.?"

"In person. There's a story he died intestate leaving an estate for heirs unknown. That was in 1868. Today at compound interest that estate is worth millions. Understand?"

Warbeck nodded. "I'm educated," he murmured.

"Anybody named Buchanan is a sucker for this setup. It's a switch on the Spanish Prisoner routine. I send them a letter. Tell 'em there's a chance they may be one of the heirs. Do they want me to investigate and protect their cut in the estate? It only costs a small yearly retainer. Most of them buy it. From all over the country. And now you —"

"Wait a minute," Warbeck exclaimed. "I can draw a conclusion. You found out I was checking the Buchanan families. You think I'm trying to operate the same racket. Cut in . . . cut in? Yes? Cut in on you?"

"Well," Herod asked angrily, "aren't you?"

"Oh God!" Warbeck cried. "That this should happen to me. Me! Thank You, God. Thank You. I'll always be grateful." In his happy fervor he turned to Joe. "Give me the towel," he said. "Just throw it. I've got to wipe my face." He caught the flung towel and mopped himself joyously.

"Well," Herod repeated. "Aren't you?"

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"No," Warbeck answered, "I'm not cutting in on you. But I'm grateful for the mistake. Don't think I'm not. You can't imagine how flattering it is for a schoolteacher to be taken for a thief."

He got out of the chair and went to the desk to reclaim his wallet and other possessions.

"Just a minute," Herod snapped.

The thin young man reached out and grasped Warbeck's wrist with an iron clasp.

"Oh stop it," the doomed man said impatiently. "This is a silly mistake."

"I'll tell you whether it's a mistake and I'll tell you if it's silly," Herod replied. "Just now you'll do as you're told."

"Will I?" Warbeck wrenched his wrist free and slashed Joe across the eyes with the towel. He darted around behind the desk, snatched up a paper weight and hurled it through the window with a shattering crash.

"Joe!" Herod yelled.

Warbeck knocked the phone off its stand and dialed Operator. He picked up his cigarette lighter, flicked it and dropped it into the wastepaper basket. The voice of the operator buzzed in the phone. Warbeck shouted, "I want a policeman!" Then he kicked the flaming basket into the center of the office.

"Joe!" Herod yelled and stamped on the blazing paper.

Warbeck grinned. He picked up the phone. Squawking noises were coming out of it. He put one hand over the mouthpiece. "Shall we negotiate?" he inquired.

"You son of a bitch," Joe growled. He took his hands from his eyes and slid toward Warbeck.

"No!" Herod called. "This crazy fool's hollered copper. He's legit, Joe." To Warbeck he said in pleading tones, "Fix it. Square it. We'll make it up to you. Anything you say. Just square the call."

The doomed man lifted the phone to his mouth. He said, "My name is M. P. Warbeck. I was consulting my attorney at this number and some idiot with a misplaced sense of humor made this call. Please phone back and check."

He hung up, finished pocketing his private property and winked at Herod. The phone rang. Warbeck picked it up, reassured the police and hung up. He came around from behind the desk and handed his car keys to Joe.

"Go down to my car," he said. "You know where you parked it. Open the glove compartment and bring up a brown manila envelope you'll find."

"Go to hell," Joe spat. His eyes were still tearing.

"Do as I say," Warbeck said firmly.

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"Just a minute, Warbeck," Herod said. "What's this? A new angle? I said we'd make it up to you, but —"

"I'm going to explain why I'm interested in the Buchanans," Warbeck replied. "And I'm going into partnership with you. You've got what I need to locate one particular Buchanan . . . you and Joe. My Buchanan's ten years old. He's worth a hundred times your make-believe million dollars."

Herod stared at him.

Warbeck placed the keys in Joe's hand. "Go down and get that envelope, Joe," he said. "And while you're at it you'd better square that broken window rap. Rap? Rap."

The doomed man placed the manila envelope neatly on his lap. "A school principal," he explained, "has to supervise school classes. He reviews their work. Estimates progress. Irons out student problems and so on. This must be done at random. By samplings, I mean. I have 700 pupils in my school. I can't supervise them individually."

Herod nodded. Joe looked blank.

"Looking through some fifth grade work last month," Warbeck continued, "I came across this astonishing document." He opened the envelope and took out a few sheets of ruled composition paper covered with blots and scrawled writing. "It was written by a Stuart Buchanan of the fifth grade. His age must be ten or thereabouts. The composition is entitled: '*My Vacation.*' Read it and you'll understand why Stuart Buchanan must be found."

He tossed the sheets to Herod who picked them up, took out a pair of horn-rim spectacles and balanced them on his fat nose. Joe came around to the back of his chair and peered over his shoulder.

My Vacatoin
by
Stuart Buchanan

This sumer I vissited my frends. I have 4 frends and they are verry nice. First there is Tommy who lives in the contry and he is an astronnimer. Tommy bilt his own tellescop out of glass 6 inches acros wich he grond himself. He loks at the stars every nihgt and he let me lok even wen it was raining cats & dogs.

"What the hell?" Herod looked up, annoyed.

"Read on. Read on," Warbeck said.

cats & dogs. We cold see the stars becaze Tommy made a thing for over the end

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of the tellescop wich shoots up like a serchlite and makes a hole in the skie to see rite thru the rain and everythinng to the stars.

"Finished the astronomer yet?" Warbeck inquired.

"I don't dig it."

"Tommy got bored waiting for clear nights. He invented something that cuts through clouds and atmosphere . . . a funnel of vacuum so he can use his telescope all weather. What it amounts to is a disintegration beam."

"The hell you say."

"The hell I don't. Read on. Read on."

Then I went to AnnMary and staied one hole week. It was fun. Becaze AnnMary has a spinak chainger for spinak and beats and strinbeens.

"What the hell is a 'spinak chainger'?"

"Spinach. Spinach changer. Spelling isn't one of Stuart's specialties. 'Beats' are beets. 'Strinbeens' are string beans."

beats and strinbeens. Wen her mother made us eet them AnnMary presed the buton and they staid the same outside onnly inside they become cake. Chery and strowbery. I asted AnnMary how & she sed it was by Enhv.

"This, I don't get."

"Simple. Anne-Marie doesn't like vegetables. So she's just as smart as Tommy, the astronomer. She invented a matter-transmuter. She transmutes spinak into cake. Chery or strowbery. Cake she eats with pleasure. So does Stuart."

"You're crazy."

"Not me. The kids. They're geniuses. Geniuses? What am I saying? They make a genius look imbecilic. There's no label for these children."

"I don't believe it. This Stuart Buchanan's got a tall imagination. That's all."

"You think so? Then what about Enhv? That's how Anne-Marie transmutes matter. It took time but I figured Enhv out. It's Planck's quantum equation. E = nhv. But read on. Read on. The best is yet to come. Wait till you get to lazy Ethel."

My frend Gorge bilds modell airplanes very good and small. Gorg's hands are clumzy but he makes small men out of moddelling clay and he tels them and they bild for him.

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"What's this?"

"George, the plane-maker?"

"Yes."

"Simple. He makes miniature androids . . . robots . . . and they build the planes for him. Clever boy, George, but read about his sister, lazy Ethel."

His sister Ethel is the lazyist girl I ever saw. She is big & fat and she hates to walk. So wen her mothar sends her too the store Ethel thinks to the store and thinks home with all the pakejes and has to hang arownd Gorg's room hiding untill it wil look like she walked both ways. Gorge and I make fun of her becaze she is fat and lazy but she gets into the movees for free and saw Hoppalong Casidy sixteen times.

The End

Herod stared at Warbeck.

"Great little girl, Ethel," Warbeck said. "She's too lazy to walk so she teleports. Then she has a devil of a time covering up. She has to hide while George and Stuart make fun of her."

"Teleports?"

"That's right. She moves from place to place by thinking her way there."

"There ain't no such thing!" Joe said indignantly.

"There wasn't until lazy Ethel came along."

"I don't believe this," Herod said. "I don't believe any of it."

"You think it's just Stuart's imagination?"

"What else?"

"What about Planck's equation? E = nhv?"

"The kid invented that too. Coincidence."

"Does that sound likely?"

"Then he read it somewhere."

"A ten year old boy? Nonsense."

"I tell you, I don't believe it," Herod shouted. "Let me talk to the kid for five minutes and I'll prove it."

"That's exactly what I want to do . . . only the boy's disappeared."

"How do you mean?"

"Lock, stock and barrel. That's why I've been checking every Buchanan family in the city. The day I read this composition and sent down to the fifth grade for Stuart Buchanan to have a talk, he disappeared. He hasn't been seen since."

"What about his family?"

"The family disappeared too." Warbeck leaned forward intensely. "Get

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this. Every record of the boy and the family disappeared. Everything. A few people remember them vaguely, but that's all. They're gone."

"Jesus," Joe said. "They scrammed, huh?"

"The very word. Scrammed. Thank you, Joe." Warbeck cocked an eye at Herod. "What a situation. Here's a child who makes friends with child geniuses. And the emphasis is on child. They're making fantastic discoveries for childish purposes. Ethel teleports because she's too lazy to run errands. George makes robots to build model planes. Anne-Marie transmutes elements because she hates spinach. God knows what Stuart's other friends are doing. Maybe there's a Matthew who's invented a time machine so he can catch up on his homework."

Herod waved his hands feebly. "Why geniuses all of a sudden? What's happened?"

"I don't know. Atomic radiation? Fluorides in drinking water? Antibiotics? Vitamins? We're doing so much juggling with body chemistry these days who knows what's happening? I want to find out but I can't. Stuart Buchanan blabbed like a child. When I started investigating he got scared and disappeared."

"Is he a genius too?"

"Very likely. Kids generally hang out with kids who share the same interests and talents."

"What kind of a genius? What's his talent?"

"I don't know. All I know is he disappeared. He covered up his tracks, destroyed every paper that could possibly help me locate him and vanished into thin air."

"How did he get into your files?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe he's a crook type," Joe said. "Expert at breaking and entering and such."

Herod smiled wanly. "A racketeer genius? A master-mind? The kid Moriarty?"

"He could be a thief-genius but don't let running away convince you. All children do that when they get caught in a crisis. Either they wish it never happened or they wish they were a million miles away. Stuart Buchanan may be a million miles away but we've got to find him."

"Just to find out is he smart?" Joe asked.

"No, to find his friends. Do I have to diagram it? What would the army pay for a disintegration beam? What would an element-transmuter be worth? If we could manufacture living robots how rich would we get? If we could teleport how powerful would we be?"

There was a burning silence, then Herod got to his feet. "Mr. Warbeck,"

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he said, "you make me and Joe look like pikers. Thank you for letting us cut in on you. We'll pay off. We'll find that kid."

It is not possible for anyone to vanish without a trace . . . even a possible criminal genius. It is sometimes difficult to locate that trace . . . even for an expert experienced in hurried disappearances. But there is a professional technique unknown to amateurs.

"You've just been blundering," Herod explained kindly to the doomed man. "Chasing one Buchanan after the other. There are angles. You don't run after a missing party. You look around on his backtrail for something he dropped."

"A genius wouldn't drop anything."

"Let's grant the kid's a genius. Type unspecified. Let's grant him everything. But a kid is a kid. He must have overlooked something. We'll find it."

In three days Warbeck was introduced to the most astonishing angles of search. They consulted the Washington Heights post office about a Buchanan family formerly living in that neighborhood, now moved. Was there any change-of-address-card filed? None.

They visited the election board. All voters are registered by wards. If a voter moves from one election district to another, provision is usually made that a record of the transfer be kept. Was there any such record on Buchanan? None.

They called on the Washington Heights office of the gas and electric company. All subscribers for gas and electricity must transfer their accounts if they move. If they move out of town, they generally request the return of their deposit. Was there any record of a party named Buchanan? None.

It is a state law that all drivers must notify the license bureau of change of address or be subject to penalties involving fines, prison or worse. Was there any such notification by a party named Buchanan at the Motor Vehicle Bureau? There was not.

They questioned the R-J Realty Corp., owners and operators of a multiple dwelling in Washington Heights in which a party named Buchanan had leased a four room apartment. The R-J lease, like most other leases, required the names and addresses of two character references for the tenant. Could the character references for Buchanan be produced? They could not. There was no such lease in the files.

"Maybe Joe was right," Warbeck complained in Herod's office. "Maybe the boy is a thief-genius. How did he think of everything? How did he get at every paper and destroy it? Did he break and enter? Bribe? Burgle? Threaten? How did he do it?"

"We'll ask him when we get to him," Herod said grimly. "All right. The

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kid's licked us straight down the line. He hasn't forgotten a trick. But I've got one angle I've been saving. Let's go up and see the janitor of their building."

"I questioned him months ago," Warbeck objected. "He remembers the family in a vague way and that's all. He doesn't know where they went."

"He knows something else, something the kid wouldn't think of covering. Let's go get it."

They drove up to Washington Heights and descended upon Mr. Jacob Ruysdale at dinner in the basement apartment of the building. Mr. Ruysdale disliked being separated from his liver & onions but was persuaded by $5.

"About that Buchanan family," Herod began.

"I told him everything before," Ruysdale broke in, pointing to Warbeck.

"All right. He forgot to ask one question. Can I ask it now?"

Ruysdale re-examined the $5 bill and nodded.

"When anybody moves in or out of a building, the superintendent usually takes down the name of the movers in case they damage the building. I'm a lawyer. I know this. It's to protect the building in case suit has to be brought. Right?"

Ruysdale's face lit up. "By Godfrey!" he said. "That's right. I forgot all about it. He never asked me."

"He didn't know. You've got the name of the company that moved the Buchanans out. Right?"

Ruysdale ran across the room to a cluttered bookshelf. He withdrew a tattered journal and flipped it open. He wet his fingers and turned pages.

"Here it is," he said. "The Avon Moving Company. Truck No. G-4."

The Avon Moving Company had no record of the removal of a Buchanan family from an apartment in Washington Heights. "The kid was pretty careful at that," Herod murmured. But it did have a record of the men working truck G-4 on that day. The men were interviewed when they checked in at closing time. Their memories were refreshed with whiskey and cash. They recalled the Washington Heights job vaguely. It was a full day's work because they had to drive the hell and gone to Brooklyn. "Oh God! Brooklyn!" Warbeck muttered. What address in Brooklyn? Something on Maple Park Row. Number? The number could not be recalled.

"Joe, buy a map."

They examined the street map of Brooklyn and located Maple Park Row. It was indeed the hell and gone out of civilization and was twelve blocks long. "That's *Brooklyn* blocks," Joe grunted. "Twice as long as anywhere. I know."

Herod shrugged. "We're close," he said. "The rest will have to be leg

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work. Four blocks apiece. Cover every house, every apartment. List every kid around ten. Then Warbeck can check them, if they're under an alias."

"There's a million kids a square inch in Brooklyn," Joe protested.

"There's a million dollars a day in it for us if we find him. Now let's go."

Maple Park Row was a long crooked street lined with five-story apartment houses. Its sidewalks were lined with baby carriages and old ladies on camp chairs. Its curbs were lined with parked cars. Its gutter was lined with crude whitewash stickball courts shaped like elongated diamonds. Every sewer was a home plate.

"It's just like the Bronx," Joe said nostalgically. "I ain't been home to the Bronx in ten years."

He wandered sadly down the street toward his sector, automatically threading his way through stickball games with the unconscious skill of the city-born. Warbeck remembered that departure sympathetically because Joe Davenport never returned.

The first day, he and Herod imagined Joe had found a hot lead. This encouraged them. The second day they realized no heat could keep Joe on the fire for 48 hours. This depressed them. On the third day they had to face the truth.

"He's dead," Herod said flatly. "The kid got him."

"How?"

"He killed him."

"A ten year old boy? A child?"

"You want to know what kind of genius Stuart Buchanan has, don't you? I'm telling you."

"I don't believe it."

"Then explain Joe."

"He quit."

"Not on a million dollars."

"But where's the body?"

"Ask the kid. He's the genius. He's probably figured out tricks that would make Dutch Schultz jealous."

"How did he kill him?"

"Ask the kid. He's the genius."

"Herod, I'm scared."

"So am I. Do you want to quit now?"

"I don't see how we can. If the boy's dangerous we've got to find him."

"Civic virtue, heh?"

"Call it that."

"Well, I'm still thinking about the money."

They returned to Maple Park Row and Joe Davenport's four-block

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sector. They were cautious, almost furtive. They separated and began working from each end toward the middle; in one house, up the stairs, apartment by apartment, to the top, then down again to investigate the next building. It was slow, tedious work. Occasionally they glimpsed each other far down the street, crossing from one dismal building to another. And that was the last glimpse Warbeck ever had of Walter Herod.

He sat in his car and waited. He sat in his car and trembled. "I'll go to the police," he muttered, knowing perfectly well he could not. "The boy has a weapon. Something he invented. Something silly like the others. A special light so he can play marbles at night, only it murders men. A machine to play checkers, only it hypnotizes men. He's invented a robot mob of gangsters so he can play cops-and-robbers and they took care of Joe and Herod. He's a child genius. Dangerous. Deadly. What am I going to do?"

The doomed man got out of the car and stumbled down the street toward Herod's half of the sector. "What's going to happen when Stuart Buchanan grows up?" he wondered. "What's going to happen when all the rest of them grow up? Tommy and George and Anne-Marie and lazy Ethel? Why don't I start running away now? What am I doing here?"

It was dusk on Maple Park Row. The old ladies had withdrawn, folding their camp chairs like Arabs. The parked cars remained. The stickball games were over, but small games were starting under the glowing lamp posts . . . games with bottle caps and baseball cards and battered pennies. Overhead, the purple city haze was deepening, and through it the sharp sparkle of Venus following the sun below the horizon could be seen.

"He must know his power," Warbeck muttered angrily. "He must know how dangerous he is. That's why he's running away. Guilt. That's why he destroys us, one by one, smiling to himself, a crafty child, a vicious, killing genius . . ."

Warbeck stopped in the middle of Maple Park Row.

"Buchanan!" he shouted. "Stuart Buchanan!"

The kids near him stopped their games and gaped.

"Stuart Buchanan!" Warbeck's voice cracked hysterically. "Can you hear me?"

His wild voice carried farther down the street. More games stopped. Ringaleevio, Chinese tag, Red-Light and Boxball.

"Buchanan!" Warbeck screamed. "Stuart Buchanan! Come out, come out, wherever you are!"

The world hung motionless.

In the alley between 217 and 219 Maple Park Row, playing hide-and-seek behind piled ash barrels, Stuart Buchanan heard his name and crouched lower. He was aged ten, dressed in sweater, jeans and sneakers. He was

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intent and determined that he was not going to be caught out "it" again. He was going to hide until he could make a dash for home-free in safety. As he settled comfortably among the ash cans, his eye caught the glimmer of Venus low in the western sky.

"Star light, star bright," he whispered in all innocence, "First star I see tonight. Wish I may, wish I might, grant me the wish I wish tonight." He paused and considered. Then he wished. "God bless Mom and Pop and me and all my friends and make me a good boy and please let me be always happy and I wish that anybody who tries to bother me would go away . . . a long way away . . . and leave me alone forever."

In the middle of Maple Park Row, Marion Perkin Warbeck stepped forward and drew breath for another hysterical yell. And then he was elsewhere, going away on a road that was a long way away. It was a straight white road cleaving infinitely through blackness, stretching onward and onward into forever. A dreary, lonely, endless road leading away and away and away.

Down that road Warbeck plodded, an astonished automaton, unable to speak, unable to stop, unable to think in the timeless infinity. Onward and onward he walked into a long way away, unable to turn back. Ahead of him he saw the minute specks of figures trapped on that one-way road to forever. There was a dot that had to be Herod. Ahead of Herod was a mote that was Joe Davenport. And ahead of Joe he could make out a long dwindling chain of mites. He turned once with a convulsive effort. Behind him, dim and distant, a figure was plodding, and behind that another abruptly materialized, and another, and another . . .

While Stuart Buchanan crouched behind the ash barrels and watched alertly for the "it." He was unaware that he had disposed of Warbeck. He was unaware that he had disposed of Herod, Joe Davenport and scores of others. He was unaware that he had induced his parents to flee Washington Heights, that he had destroyed papers and documents, memories and peoples in his simple desire to be left alone. He was unaware that he was a genius.

His genius was for wishing.

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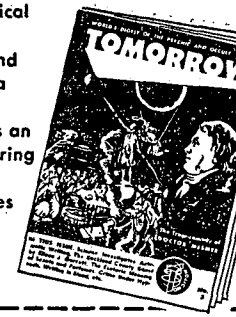

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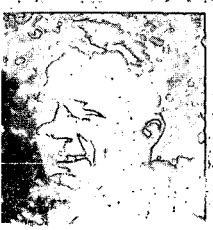

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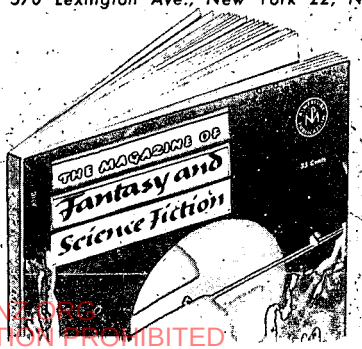

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